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THE GREY LADY

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BY

HENRY SETON MERRIMAN

AUTHOR OF
"WITH EDGED TOOLS," "THE SLAVE OF THE LAMP," ETC.

"The dog that snapt the shadow, dropt the bone"

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE.
1895.

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THE GREY LADY

BOOK THE FIRST

CHAPTER I

TWO IN THE FIELD

"Qui n'accepte pas le regret n'accepte pas la vie."

THE train technically known as the "Flying Dutchman," tearing through the plains of Taunton, and in a first-class carriage by themselves, facing each other, two boys.

One of these boys remembers the moment to this day. A journey accomplished with Care for a travelling companion usually adheres to the wheels of memory until those wheels are still. Grim Care was with these boys in the railway carriage. A great catastrophe had come to them. A FitzHenry had failed to pass into her Majesty's Navy. Back and back through the generations —back to the days when England had no navy—she had always been served at sea by a FitzHenry. Moreover, there had always been a Henry of that name on the books. Henry, the son of Henry, had, as a matter of

course, gone down to the sea in a ship, had done his country's business in the great waters.

There was, if they could have looked at it from a racial point of view, one small grain of consolation. The record was not even now snapped—for Henry had succeeded, Luke it was who had failed.

Henry sat with his back to the engine, looking out over the flat meadow-land, with some moisture remarkably like a tear in either eye. The eyes were blue, deep, and dark like the eastern horizon when the sun is setting over the sea. The face was brown, and oval, and still. It looked like a face that belonged to a race, something that had been handed down with the inherent love of blue water. It is probable that many centuries ago, a man with features such as these, with eyes such as these, and crisp, closely curling hair, had leaped ashore from his open Viking boat, shouting defiance to the Briton.

This son of countless Henrys sat and thought the world was hollow, with no joy in it, and no hope, because Luke had failed.

We are told that there shall be two in the field, that the one shall be taken and the other left. But we have yet to learn why, in our limited vision, the choice seems invariably to be mistaken. We have yet to learn why he who is doing good work is called from the field, leaving there the man whose tastes are urban.

Except for the sake of the record—and we cannot really be expected in these busy times to live for generations past or yet unborn—except for the record it would

have been more expedient that Henry should fail and Luke succeed. Everybody knew this. It was the common talk on board the *Britannia*. Even the examiners knew it. Luke himself was aware of it. But there had always been a fatality about Luke.

And now, when it was quite apparent that Luke was a sailor and nothing else, the Navy would have none of him. Those who knew him—his kindly old captain and others—averred that, with a strict and unquestionable discipline, Luke FitzHenry could be made a first-class officer and a brilliant sailor. No one quite understood him, not even his brother Henry, usually known as Fitz. Fitz did not understand him now; he had not understood him since the fatal notice had been posted on the broad mainmast, of which some may wot. He did not know what to say, so, like the wise old Duke, he said nothing.

In the mean time the train raced on. Every moment brought them nearer to London and to the Honourable Mrs. Harrington.

Fitz seemed to be realizing this, for he glanced uneasily at his brother, whose morose, sullen face was turned resolutely towards the window.

"She'll be a fool," he said, "if she does not give you another chance."

"I would not take it," answered Luke, mechanically.

He was darker than his brother, with a longer chin and a peculiar twist of the lips. His eyes were lighter in colour, and rather too close together. A keen observer

would have put him down as a boy who in manhood might go wrong. The strange thing was that no one could have hesitated for a moment in selecting Luke as the cleverer of the two.

Fitz paused. He was not so quick with his tongue as with his limbs. He knew his brother well enough to foresee the effect of failure. Luke FitzHenry was destined to be one of those unfortunate men who fail ungracefully.

"Do not decide in too great a hurry," said Fitz at length, rather lamely. "Don't be a fool!"

"No, it has been decided for me by my beastly bad luck."

"It *was* bad luck—deuced bad luck."

They had bought a packet of cigarettes at Exeter, but that outward sign of manhood lay untouched on the seat beside Fitz. It almost seemed as if manhood had come to them both in a more serious form than a swaggering indulgence in tobacco.

The boys were obviously brothers, but not aggressively twins. For Luke was darker than Fitz, and somewhat shorter in stature.

It is probable that neither of them had ever seriously contemplated the possibility of failure for one and not for the other. Neither had ever looked onward, as it were, into life to see himself there without the other. The life that they both anticipated was that life on the ocean wave, of which home-keeping poets sing so eloquently; and it had always been vaguely taken for granted that no great difference in rank or success could

sever them. Fitz was too simple-minded, too honest to himself, to look for great honours in his country's service. He mistrusted himself. Luke mistrusted Providence.

Such was the difference between these two boys—the thin end of a wedge of years which, spreading out in after days, turned each life into a path of its own, sending each man inexorably on his separate way.

These two boys were almost alone in the world. Their mother had died in giving them birth. Their father, an old man when he married, reached his alloted span when his sons first donned Her Majesty's brass buttons, and quietly went to keep his watch below. Discipline had been his guiding star through life, and when Death called him he obeyed without a murmur, trusting confidently to the Naval Department in the first place, and the good God in the second, to look after his boys.

That the late Admiral FitzHenry had sorely misplaced his confidence in the first instance was a fact which the two boys were now called upon to face alone in their youthful ignorance of the world. Fitz was uneasily conscious of a feeling of helplessness, as if some all-powerful protector had suddenly been withdrawn. Their two lives had been pre-committed to the parental care of their country, and now it almost took their breath away to realize that Luke had no such protector.

His was the pride that depreciates self. During the last twenty-four hours Fitz had heard him boast of his failure, holding it up with a singularly triumphant sneer, as if he had always distrusted his destiny and took a

certain pleasure in verifying his own prognostications. There are some men who find a satisfaction in bad luck which good fortune could never afford them.

In a large house in Grosvenor Square two ladies were at that same moment speaking of the FitzHenrys. It was quite easy to see that the smaller lady of the two was the mistress of the house, as also of that vague abstract called the situation. She sat in the most comfortable chair, which was, by the way, considerably too spacious for her, and there was a certain aggressive sense of possession about her attitude and manner.

Had she been a man, one would have said at once that here was a *nouveau riche*, ever heedful of the fact that the big room and all the appurtenances thereof were the fruits of toil and perseverance. There was a distinct suggestion of self-manufacture about Mrs. Harrington—distinct, that is to say, to the more subtle-minded. For she was not vulgar, neither did she boast. But the expression of her keen and somewhat worldly countenance betokened the intention of holding her own.

The Honourable Mrs. Harrington was not only beautifully dressed, but knew how to wear her clothes *en grande dame*.

"Yes," she was saying, "Luke has failed to pass off the *Britannia*. It is a rare occurrence. I suppose the boy is a fool."

Mrs. Harrington was rather addicted to the practice of calling other people names. If the butler made a mistake she dubbed him an idiot at once. She did not actually

call her present companion, Mrs. Ingham-Baker, a fool, possibly because she considered the fact too apparent to require note.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker, stout and cringing, smoothed out the piece of silken needlework with which she moved through life, and glanced at her companion. She wanted to say the right thing. And Mrs. Harrington was what the French call "difficult." One could never tell what the right thing might be. The art of saying it is, moreover, like an ear for music, it is not to be acquired. And Mrs. Ingham-Baker had not been gifted thus.

"And yet," she said, "their father was a clever man—as I have been told."

"By whom?" inquired Mrs. Harrington, blandly.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker paused in distress.

"I wonder who it was," she pretended to reflect.

"So do I," snapped Mrs. Harrington.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker's imagination was a somewhat ponderous affair, and, when she trusted to it, it usually ran her violently down a steep place. She concluded to say nothing more about the late Admiral FitzHenry.

"The boy," said Mrs. Harrington, returning to the hapless Luke, "has had every advantage. I suppose he will try to explain matters when he comes. I could explain it in one word—stupidity."

"Perhaps," put in Mrs. Ingham-Baker, nervously, "the brains have all gone to the other brother, Henry. It is sometimes so with twins."

Mrs. Harrington laughed rather derisively.

"Stupid woman to have twins," she muttered.

This was apparently one of several grievances against the late Mrs. FitzHenry.

"They have a little money of their own, have they not?" inquired Mrs. Ingham-Baker, with the soft blandness of one for whom money has absolutely no attraction.

"About enough to pay their washerwoman."

There was a pause, and then Mrs. Ingham-Baker heaved a little sigh.

"I am sure, dear," she said, "that in some way you will be rewarded for your great kindness to these poor orphan boys."

She shook her head wisely, as if reflecting over the numerous cases of rewarded virtue which had come under her notice, and the action made two jet ornaments in her cap wobble, in a ludicrous manner, from side to side.

"That may be," admitted the lady of the house, "though I wish I felt as sure about it as you do."

"But then," continued Mrs. Ingham-Baker, in a low and feeling tone, "you always were the soul of generosity."

The "soul of generosity" gave an exceedingly wise little smile—almost as if she knew better—and looked up sharply towards the door. At the same moment the butler appeared.

"Mr. Pawson, ma'am," he said.

The little nod with which this information was received seemed to indicate that Mr. Pawson had been expected.

Beneath her black curls Mrs. Ingham-Baker's beady eyes were very much on the alert.

"In the library, James," said Mrs. Harrington—and the two jet ornaments bending over the silken needlework gave a little throb of disappointment.

"Mr. Pawson," announced the lady of the house, "is the legal light who casts a shadow of obscurity over my affairs."

And with that she left the room.

As soon as the door was closed Mrs. Ingham-Baker was on her feet. She crossed the room to where her hostess's key-basket and other belongings stood upon a table near the window. She stood looking eagerly at these without touching them. She even stooped down to examine the address of an envelope.

"Mr. Pawson!" she said in a breathless whisper. "Mr. Pawson—what does that mean? Can she be going to alter her—no! But—yes, it may be! Perhaps Susan knows."

Mrs. Ingham-Baker then rang the bell twice, and resumed her seat.

Presently an aged servant came into the room. It was easy to see at a glance that she was a very old woman, but the years seemed to weigh less on her mind than on her body.

"Yes," she said composedly.

"Oh—eh, Susan," began Mrs. Ingham-Baker almost cringingly. "I rang because I wanted to know if a parcel has come for me—a parcel of floss-silk—from that shop in Buckingham Palace Road, you know."

"If it had come," replied Susan, with withering composure, "it would have been sent up to you."

"Yes, yes, of course I know that, Susan. But I thought that perhaps it might have been insufficiently addressed or something—that you or Mary might have thought that it was for Mrs. Harrington."

"She don't use floss silks," replied the imperturbable Susan.

"I was just going to ask her about it, when she was called away by some one. I think she said that it was her lawyer."

"Yes, Mr. Pawson."

Susan's manner implied—very subtly and gently—that her place in this pleasant house was more assured than that of Mrs. Ingham-Baker, and perhaps that stout diplomatist awoke to this implication, for she pulled herself up with considerable dignity.

"I hope that nothing is wrong," she said, in a tone that was intended to disclaim all intention of discussing such matters with a menial. "I should be sorry if Mrs. Harrington was drawn into any legal difficulty; the law is so complicated."

Susan was engaged in looking for a speck of dust on the mantelpiece, not for its own intrinsic value, but for the sake of Mary's future. She had apparently no observation of value to offer upon the vexed subject of the law.

"I was rather afraid," pursued Mrs. Ingham-Baker gravely, "that Mrs. Harrington might be unduly incensed against that poor boy, Luke FitzHenry; that in a moment of disappointment, you know, she might

be making some—well, some alteration in her will to the detriment of the boy."

Susan stood for a moment in front of the lady, with a strange little smile of amusement among the wrinkles of her face.

"Yes, that may be," she said, and quietly left the room.

CHAPTER II

A MAN DOWN

"Caress the favourites, avoid the unfortunate, and trust nobody."

THE atmosphere of Mrs. Harrington's drawing-room seemed to absorb the new-found manhood of the two boys, for they came forward shyly, overawed by the consciousness of their own boots, by the conviction that they carried with them the odour of cigarette smoke and failure.

"Well, my dears," said the Honourable Mrs. Harrington, suddenly softened despite herself by the sight of their brown young faces. "Well, come here and kiss me."

All the while she was vaguely conscious that she was surprising herself and others. She had not intended to treat them thus. Mrs. Harrington was a woman who had a theory of life—not a theory to talk about, but to act upon. Her theory was that "heart" is all nonsense. She looked upon existence here below as a series of contracts entered into with one's neighbour for purposes of mutual enjoyment or advantage. She thought that

life could be put down in black and white. Which was a mistake. She had gone through fifty years of it without discovering that for the sake of some memory —possibly a girlish one—hidden away behind her cold grey eyes, she could never be sure of herself in dealing with man or boy whose being bore the impress of the sea.

The strange thing was that she had never found it out. We speak pityingly of animals that do not know their own strength. Which of us knows his own weakness? There was a man connected with Mrs. Harrington's life, one of the contractors in black and white, who had found out this effect of a brown face and a blue coat upon a woman otherwise immovable. This man, Cipriani de Lloseta, who contemplated life, as it were, from a quiet corner of the dress circle, kept his knowledge for his own use.

Fitz and Luke obeyed her invitation without much enthusiasm. They were boyish enough to object to kissing on principle. They then shook hands awkwardly with Mrs. Ingham-Baker, and drifted together again with that vague physical attraction which seems to qualify twins for double harness on the road of life. There was trouble ahead of them, and without defining the situation, like soldiers surprised, they instinctively touched shoulders.

It was the psychological moment. There was a little pause, during which Mrs. Harrington seemed to stiffen herself, morally and physically. Had she not stiffened

herself, had she only allowed herself, as it were, to go—to call Luke to her and comfort him and sympathize with him—it would have altered every life in that room, and others outside of it. Even blundering, cringing, fool Mrs. Ingham-Baker would have acted more wisely, for she would have followed the dictates of an exceedingly soft, if shallow, heart.

"I had hoped for a more satisfactory home-coming than this," said Mrs. Harrington in her hardest voice. When she spoke in this tone there was the faintest suggestion of a London accent.

Fitz made a little movement, a step forward, as if she had been unconsciously approaching the brink of some danger, and he wished to warn her. The peculiar twist in Luke's lips became momentarily more visible, and he kept his deep, despondent eyes fixed on the speaker's face.

There are two kinds of rich women. The one spends her money in doing good, the other pays it away to gratify her love of power. Of the Honourable Mrs. Harrington it was never reported that she was lavish in her charities.

"I think," she said, "that I ought to tell you that I have been paying the expenses of your education almost entirely. I was in no way bound to do so. I took charge of you at your father's death because—I—because he was a true friend to me. I do not grudge the money, but in return I expected you to work hard and get on in your profession."

She stiffened herself with a rustling sound of silk, proudly conscious of injured virtue, full of the charity that exacteth a high interest.

"We did our best," replied Fitz, with a simple intrepidity which rather spoilt the awesomeness of the situation.

"I am not speaking to you," returned the lady. "You have worked and have passed your examination satisfactorily. You are not clever—I know that; but you have managed to get into the Navy, where your father was before you, and your grandfather before him. I have no doubt you will give satisfaction to your superior officers. I was talking to Luke."

"We all knew that," said Luke, in a dangerous voice, which trite observation she chose to ignore.

"You have had equal advantages," pursued the dispenser of charity. "I have shown no favour; I have treated you alike. It had been my intention to do so all your lives and after my death."

Mrs. Ingham-Baker was so interested at this juncture that she leant forward with parted lips, listening eagerly. The Honourable Mrs. Harrington allowed herself the plebeian pleasure of returning the stare with a questioning glance which broke off into a little laugh.

"Have you," she continued, addressing Luke directly, "any reason to offer for your failure—beyond the usual one of bad luck?"

Luke looked at her in a lowering way and made no reply. Had Mrs. Harrington been a poor woman, she

would have recognized that the boy was at the end of his tether. But she had always been surrounded by such women are—by men, and more especially by women, who would swallow any insult, any insolence, so long as it was gilded. The world had, in fact, accepted the Honourable Mrs. Harrington because she could afford to gild herself.

"It was bad luck, and nothing else," burst out Fitz, heedless of her sarcastic tones. "Luke is a better sailor than I am. But he always was weak in his astronomy, and it all turned on astronomy."

"I should imagine it all turned on stupidity," said Mrs. Harrington.

"I'm stupid, if you like," said Fitz; "Luke isn't. Luke is clever; ask any chap on board!"

"I do not need to ask any chap on board," said Mrs. Harrington. "My own common sense tells me that he is clever. He has proved it."

"It's like a woman—to hit a fellow when he's down," said Luke, with his hands deep in his pockets.

He turned to Mrs. Ingham-Baker for sympathy in this sentiment, and that soft-hearted lady deemed it expedient to turn hastily away, avoiding his glance, denying all partisanship.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker was not a person given to the disguise of her own feelings. She was plausible enough to the outer world. To herself she was quite frank, and hardly seemed to recognize this as the event she had most desired. It is to be presumed that her heart was

like her physical self, a large, unwieldy thing, over which she had not a proper control. The organ mentioned had a way of tripping her up. It tripped her now, and she quite forgot that this quarrel was precisely what she had wanted for years. She had looked forward to it as the turning-point in her daughter Agatha's fortunes.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker had, in fact, wondered more than a thousand times why the Honourable Mrs. Harrington should do all for the FitzHenrys and nothing for Agatha. She did not attempt to attribute reasons. She knew her sex too well for that. She merely wondered, which means that she cherished a question until it grew into a grievance. The end of it she knew would be a quarrel. This might not come until the FitzHenrys should have grown to man's estate and man's privilege of quarrelling with his female relatives about the youthful female relative of some other person. But it would come, surely. Mrs. Ingham-Baker the parasite, knew her victim Mrs. Harrington, well enough to be sure of that.

And now that this quarrel had arisen—much sooner than she could have hoped—providentially brought about by an astronomical examination-paper, Mrs. Ingham-Baker was forced to face the humiliating fact that she felt sorry for Luke.

It would have been different had Agatha been present, but that ingenuous maiden was at school at Brighton. Had her daughter been in the room, Mrs. Ingham-Baker's

motherly instinct would have narrowed itself down to her. But in the absence of her own child, Luke's sorry plight appealed to that larger maternal instinct which makes good women in unlikely places.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker was, however, one of the many who learn to curb the impulse of a charitable intention. She looked out of the window, and pretended not to notice that the culprit had addressed his remark to her. To complete this convenient deafness she gave a simulated little cough of abstraction, which entirely gave her away.

Mrs. Harrington chose to ignore Luke's taunt.

"And," she inquired sweetly, "what do you intend to do now?"

Quite suddenly the boy turned on her.

"I intend," he cried, "to make my own life—whatever it may be. If I am starving I will not come to you. If half a crown would save me, I would rather die than borrow it from you. You think that you can buy everything with your cursed money. You can't buy me. You can't buy a FitzHenry. You—you can't——"

He gave a little sob, remembered his new manhood—that sudden, complete manhood which comes of sorrow—pulled himself up, and walked to the door. He opened it, turned once and glanced at his brother, and passed out of the room.

So Luke FitzHenry passed out into his life—a life which he was to make for himself. Passionate—quick to love, to hate, to suffer; deep in his feeling, susceptible

to ridicule or sarcasm—an orphan. The stairs were dark as he went down them.

Mrs. Harrington gave a little laugh as the door closed behind him. She had always been able to repurchase the friendship of her friends.

Fitz made a few steps towards the door before her voice arrested him. "Stop!" she cried.

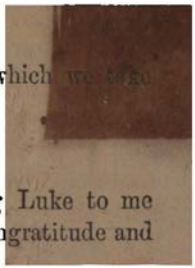
He paused, and the old sense of discipline that was in his blood made him obey. He thought that he would find Luke upstairs on his bed with his face buried in his folded arms, as he had found him a score of times during their short life.

"I think you are too hard on him," he answered hotly. "It is bad enough being ploughed, without having to stand abuse afterwards."

"My dear," said Mrs. Harrington, "just you come here and sit beside me. We will leave Luke to himself for a little. It is much better. Let him think it out alone."

What was there in this fair-haired boy's demeanour, voice, or being that appealed to Mrs. Harrington, despite her sterner self?

So Fitz was pacified by the lady's gentler manner, and consented to remain. He made good use of his time, pleading Luke's cause, explaining his bad fortune, and modestly disclaiming any credit to himself for having succeeded where his brother failed. But all the while the boy was restless, eager to get away and run upstairs to Luke, who he felt sure was living years in every



moment, as children do in those griefs which we [illegible] upon ourselves to call childish.

At last he rose.

"May I go now?" he asked.

"Yes, if you like. But do not bring Luke to me until he is prepared to apologize for his ingratitude and rudeness."

"What a dear boy he is!" ejaculated Mrs. Ingham-Baker almost before the door was closed. "So upright and honest and straightforward."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Harrington, with a sigh of anger.

"He will be a fine man," continued Mrs. Ingham-Baker. "I shall die quite happy if my Agatha marries such a man as Henry will be."

Mrs. Harrington glanced at her voluminous friend rather critically.

"You do not look like dying yet," she said.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker put her head on one side and looked resigned.

"One never knows," she answered. "It is a great responsibility, Marian, to have a daughter."

"I should imagine, from what I have seen of Agatha, that the child is quite capable of taking care of herself."

"Yes," answered the fond mother, "she is intelligent. But a girl is so helpless in the world, and when I am gone I should feel happier if I knew that my child had a good husband, such as Fitz, to take care of her."

Neither of these ladies being of the modern school of

feminine learning, the vague theology underlying this remark was allowed to pass unnoticed.

Mrs. Harrington drummed with her thin wrinkled fingers on the arm of her chair, and waited with a queer anticipatory little smile for her friend to proceed.

"But, of course," continued Mrs. Ingham-Baker, blundering into the little feminine snare, "a naval man can scarcely marry. They are always so badly off. I suppose poor Fitz will not be able to support a wife until he is quite middle-aged."

"That remains to be seen," said Mrs. Harrington, with a gleam in her hard grey eyes, and Mrs. Ingham-Baker pricked her finger.

"I am sure," said the latter lady unctuously, when she had had time to think it out, "I am sure I should be content for her to live very quietly if I only knew that she had married a good man. I always say that riches do not make happiness."

"Yes, a number of people say that," answered Mrs. Harrington, and at the same moment Fitz burst into the room.

"Aunt Marian," he cried, "he has gone!"

"Who has gone?" asked the lady of the house, coldly. "Please close the door."

"Luke! He has gone! He went straight out of the house, and the butler does not know where he went to! It is all your fault, Aunt Marian; you had no right to speak to him like that! You know you hadn't. I am going to look for him."

"Now, do not get excited," said Mrs. Harrington, soothingly. "Just come here and listen to me. Luke has behaved very badly. He has been idle and stubborn on board the *Britannia*. He has been rude and ungrateful to me."

She found she had taken the boy's hand, and she dropped it suddenly, as if ashamed of showing so much emotion.

"I am not going to have my house upset by the tantrums of a bad-tempered boy. It is nearly dinner-time. Luke is sure to come back. If he is not back by the time we have finished dinner I will send one of the men out to look for him. He is probably sulking in some corner of the gardens."

Seeing that Fitz was white with anxiety, she forgot herself so much as to draw him to her again.

"Now, Fitz," she said, "you must obey me and leave me to manage Luke in my own way. I know best. Just go and dress for dinner. Luke will come back—never fear."

But Luke did not come back.

CHAPTER III

A SEA DOG

"There is one that slippeth in his speech, but not from his heart."

THE glass door of the dining-room of the hotel of the Four Nations at Barcelona was opened softly, almost nervously, by a shock-headed little man, who peered into the room.

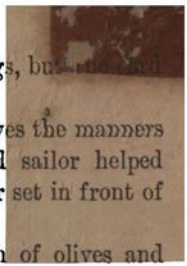
One of the waiters stepped forward and drew out a chair.

"Thank ye—thank ye," said the new-comer, in a thick though pleasant voice.

He looked around, rather bewildered—as if he had never seen a *table d'hôte* before. It almost appeared as if a doubt existed in his mind whether or not he was expected to go and shake hands with some one present, explaining who he was.

As, however, no one appeared to invite this confidence he took the chair offered and sat gravely down.

The waiter laid the *menu* at his side, and the elderly diner, whose face and person bespoke a seafaring life, gazed politely at it. He was obviously desirous of



avoiding hurting the young man's feelings, but [illegible] puzzled as much as it distressed him.

Observing with the brightest of blue eyes the manners and customs of his neighbours, the old sailor helped himself to a little wine from the decanter set in front of him, and filled up the glass with water.

The waiter drew forward a small dish of olives and another containing slices of red sausage of the thickness, consistency and flavour of a postage stamp. The Englishman looked dubiously at these delicacies and shook his head—still obviously desirous of giving no offence. Soup was more comprehensible, and the sailor consumed his portion with a [illegible]mmitting countenance. But the fish, which happened to be of a Mediterranean savour—served up in little lumps—caused considerable hesitation.

"Is it slugs?" inquired the mariner, guardedly—as if open to conviction—in a voice that penetrated half the length of the table.

The waiter explained in fluent Castilian the nature of the dish.

"I want to know if it's slugs," repeated the sailor, with a stout simplicity.

One or two commercial travellers, possessing a smattering of English, smiled openly, and an English gentleman seated at the side of the inquirer leant gravely towards him.

"That is a preparation of fish," he explained. "You won't find it at all bad."

"Thank you, sir," replied the old man, helping himself with an air of relief which would have been extremely comic had it been shorn of its pathos. "I am afraid," he went on confidentially, "of gettin' slugs to eat. I'm told that they eat them in these parts."

"This," replied the other with stupendous gravity, "is not the slug season. Besides, if you did get 'em, I dare say you would be pleasantly surprised."

"Maybe, maybe! Though I don't hold by foreign ways."

Such was the beginning of a passing friendship between two men who had nothing in common except their country; for one was a peer of the realm, travelling in Spain for the transact[illegible] his own private affairs, or possibly for the edification of his own private mind, and the other was Captain John Thomas Bontnor, late of the British mercantile service.

Being a simple-minded person, as many seamen are, Captain Bontnor sought to make himself agreeable.

"This is the first time," he said, "that I have set foot in Spain, though I've heard the language spoken, having sailed in the Spanish Main, and down to Manilla one voyage likewise. It is a strange-sounding language, I take it—a lot of jabbering and not much sense."

He spoke somewhat slowly, after the manner of one who had always had a silent tongue until grey hairs came to mellow it.

The young man, his hearer, looked slightly distressed, as if he was suppressing some emotion. He was rather a vacuous-looking young man—startlingly clean as to

countenance and linen. He was shaven, and had an air of having been distinctly a gentleman, he might have been a groom. He apparently had a habit of thrusting forward his chin for the purpose of scratching it pensively with his forefinger. This elegant trick probably indicated bewilderment, or, at all events, a slight mystification—he had recourse to it now—on the question of the Spanish language.

"Well," he answered gravely, "if you come to analyze it, I dare say there is as much sense in it as in other languages—when you know it, you know."

"Yes," murmured the captain, with a glowing sense of satisfaction at his own conversational powers. He felt he was becoming quite a society man.

"But," pursued the hereditary legislator, "it's tricky—deuced tricky. The nastiest lot of irregular verbs I've come across yet. Still, I get along all right. Worst of it is, you know, that when I've got a sentence out all right with its verbs and things, I'm not in a fit state to catch the answer."

"Knocks you on to your beam-ends," suggested Captain Bontnor.

"Yes."

Lord Seahampton settled his throat more comfortably in his spotless collar, and proceeded to help himself to a fourth mutton cutlet.

"Staying here long?" he inquired.

"No, not long," answered Captain Bontnor, slowly, as if meditating; then suddenly he burst into his story.

"You see, sir," he said, "I'm getting on in years, and I'm not quite the build for foreign travel. It sort of flurries me. I'm a bit past it. I'm not here for pleasure, you know."

This seemed to have the effect of sending Lord Seahampton off into a brown study—not apparently of great value so far as depth of thought was concerned. He looked as if he were wondering whether he himself was in Barcelona for pleasure or not.

"No," he murmured encouragingly.

"It is like this," pursued Captain Bontnor, confidentially. "My sister, Aurelia Ann, married above her."

"Very much to her credit," said Lord Seahampton, with a stolid face and a twinkle in his eye. And——"

"Died."

"Dear, dear!"

"Yes," pursued the captain, "she died nineteen years ago, leaving a little girl. He's dead now—Mr. Challoner. He's my brother-in-law, but I call him Mr. Challoner, because he's above me."

"I trust he is," said Lord Seahampton, cheerfully, with a glance at the painted ceiling. "I trust he is."

The captain chuckled. "I mean in a social way," he explained. "And now he's dead, his daughter Eve is left quite alone in the world, and she telegraphed for me. She is living in the island of Majorca."

"Ah!"

The kindly old blue eyes flashed round on his companion's face.

"Do you know it?"

The peer thrust forward his chin and spoilt what small claims he had to good looks.

"No; I've heard of it, though. I know of a wom—a lady, who has large estates there—a Mrs. Harrington."

"The Honourable Mrs. Harrington is a sort of relation of my niece's, Miss Challoner. I call her Miss Challoner, although she is my niece, because she is above me."

His lordship glanced at the ceiling again.

"I mean she is a lady. And I'm going to Majorca to fetch her. At least, I'm trying to get there, but I cannot somehow find out about the boat. They're a bit irregular, it seems, and this stupid jabbering of theirs does flurry me so. Now, what's this? Eh? Pudding, is it? Well, it doesn't look like it. No, thank ye!"

The poor old man was soon upset by insignificant trifles, and after he had given way to a little burst of petulance like this, he had a strange, half pathetic way of staring straight in front of him for a few seconds, as if collecting himself again.

It happened that Lord Seahampton was a good-natured young man, with rather a soft heart, such as many horsey persons possess. Something in Captain Bontnor touched him; some simple British quality which he was pleased to meet with, thus, in a foreign land.

"Look here," he said, "I'll go out with you afterwards and find out all about the boat, take your ticket, and fix the whole thing up."

"I'm sure you're very kind," began the old sailor,

hesitatingly. He fumbled at his necktie for a moment with unsteady, weather-beaten hands. "But I shouldn't like to trespass on your time. I take it you're here for pleasure?"

Lord Seahampton smiled.

"Yes, I'm here for pleasure; that's what I'm in the world for."

Still Captain Bontnor hesitated.

"You might meet some of your friends," he began tentatively, "in the streets, you know." He paused and looked down at his own hands; he turned one palm up, showing the faint tattoo on the wrist. "I'm only a rough seafaring man," he went on. "They might think it strange—might wonder whom you had picked up."

The spotless collar seemed to be very uncomfortable.

"I've always made a practice," mumbled Lord Seahampton, rather incoherently, "of letting my friends think what they damned well please. May I ask your name?"

"Bontnor's my name. Captain Bontnor, at your service."

"My name's Seahampton."

Captain Bontnor turned and looked at him.

"Yes, I'm Lord Seahampton."

"Oh!" ejaculated Captain Bontnor, under his breath. His social facilities did not quite rise to an occasion like this.

"As soon as you've finished," went on his companion

rather hurriedly, "we'll go out and look up these steamer people. Miss Challoner will be anxious for you to get there as soon as you can."

"Yes, yes!"

The captain laid aside his napkin and began to show signs of getting flurried again.

"Her name is Eve," he said, in the hurried way which was rather pathetic. "Now, I wonder what I should call her. Poor young thing! if she's distressed about her father's death—which is only natural, I'm sure—it would sound a bit chilly like to call her Miss Challoner. What do you think Mr.—eh—er—Lord—sir?"

"Well, I think I should call her Eve—it's a pretty name—and take her by the hand and—yes, I think I'd kiss her. Especially if she was a nice-looking girl," he added for his own personal edification as he preceded his companion into the hall.

He was fumbling in the tail pocket of his short tweed coat as he went. In the hall he turned.

"Got anything to smoke?" he asked, in his most abrupt manner, as if the cut of his collar did not allow of verbosity.

The old man shyly produced some cigars in a leather case, which had never been of great value, even in the far-off days of its youth.

"I hardly like to offer them to you," he said slowly. "T-they're not expensive, and I couldn't explain to the young woman what I wanted."

"Rather like the look of them," said Lord Seahampton, taking one and cutting the end off with a certain show of eagerness. This young man's reputation for personal bravery was a known quantity on the hunting-field. "Old sailors," he continued, "generally know good tobacco."

And all the while he had half a dozen of the best havanas in his pocket. Some instinct, which he was much too practical to define, and possibly too stupid to detect, told him that this was one of those occasions where it is much more blessed to receive than to give.

"And so," continued Captain Bontnor, as they were walking down the shady side of that noisiest street in the world, the Rambla, "and so you would just call her Eve, if you was me?"

"I should."

"Remember that she is a lady, you know. Quite a lady."

"I am remembering that," replied the peer, stolidly; "that's why I am of the opinion just expressed."

Captain Bontnor gave a little sigh of relief, as if one of his many difficulties had been removed. At the same time he glanced furtively towards the inexpensive cigar, which was affording distinct if somewhat exaggerated enjoyment.

Together they walked down the broad street and turned along the quay. And here Captain Bontnor found himself talking quite easily and affably about palm-trees and tramways, and other matters of local

interest, to the first peer whom he had ever seen in the flesh.

Out of sheer good nature, and with a vague question in his mind as to whether Miss Challoner knew what sort of help she had called in, Lord Seahampton obtained the necessary information — no easy matter in this country—and took the necessary ticket. Ticket and information alike were obtained from a grave gentleman who smoked a cigarette, and did the honours of his little office as if it had been a palace—showing no desire to sell the ticket, and taking payment as if he were conferring a distinct favour.

The steamer left that same afternoon, and Lord Seahampton sent his *protéjé* back rejoicing to the hotel to pack up. Then the youthful peer bestowed the remainder of the cheap cigar on an individual in reduced circumstances and lighted one of his own. He was quite unconscious of having done a good action. Such actions are supposed to bring their own reward, but experience suggests that it is best not to count upon anything of a tangible nature.

CHAPTER IV

PURGATORIO

"Like lutes of angels, touched so near
Hell's confines, that the damned can hear."

TIME: Five o'clock in the afternoon. Five o'clock, that is to say, by the railway time. There is another time in Barcelona—the town time, to wit—which differs from the hour of the iron road by thirty minutes or thereabouts. But then the town time is Spanish, that is to say that no one takes any notice of it. For into Spanish life time comes but little. If one wishes to catch a train—but, by the way, in Spain we do not catch, we take the train—a subtle difference—if then we wish to take the train, we arrive at the station three-quarters of an hour before the time indicated for departure, and there we make our arrangements with due dignity.

Place: The Rambla, which for those who speak alien tongues has an Arabic sound, and tells us that this, the finest promenade in the world, was once a sandy river-bed. Here now the grave caballero promenades himself from early morning to an eve that knows no dew.

Priest and peasant, the great lady and the gentleman

who sells one a glass of water for a centimo, brush past each other. The great lady is dressed in black, as all Spanish ladies are, and on her head she wears the long-lived mantilla, which will last our time and the time of our grandsons. The humbler women-folk wear bright handkerchiefs in place of the mantilla; in dress they affect bright colours.

With the sterner sex, the line of demarcation is equally distinct. There is the man who wears the peasant's blouse, and the man who wears the cloak.

It is with one of the latter that we have to deal—a tall, grave man, with quiet eyes and a long, pointed chin. The air is chilly, and this promenader's black cloak is thrown well over the shoulder, displaying the bright-coloured lining of velvet, which is all the relief the Spaniard allows his sombre self.

The caballero's face is brown, as of one whose walk is not always beneath the shady trees. The expression of it is chastened. One sees the history of a country in the faces of its men. In this there is the history of a past, it is the face of a man living in a bygone day. He notes the interest of the moment with grave surprise, but his life is behind him.

This man has the Spaniard's thoughtful interest in a trifle. He pauses to note the number of the sparrows, as thick as leaves upon the trees. He carefully unfolds his cloak, gives the loose end a little shake, and casts it skilfully over his shoulder, so that it falls across his back, and, hanging there, displays the bright lining.

He pauses to watch the result of an infantile accident. The baby picks itself up and brushes the dust from its diminutive frock with all the earnestness of early youth. And the cavalier walks on.

All this with a contemplative grandeur of demeanour worthy of larger if not better things.

In the roadway at the side of the broad promenade a carriage and pair followed this gentleman—carriage and horses which were beautiful even in this land of horses. For this was Cipriani de Lloseta de Mallorca, a great man in Barcelona, if he wished it, a greater in his own little island of Majorca, whether he wished it or not.

Leading out of this same fascinating Rambla, to the left, up towards the impenetrable fortress of Juich—impenetrable excepting once, and then it was the pestilent Englishman, as usual—leading then to the left is the Calle de la Paz. In the Street of the Peace there is a house, on the left hand also, into the door of which one could not only drive a coach and four, but eke a load of straw. Moreover, the driver could go to sleep and leave it to the horses, for there is plenty of space. This is the Casa Lloseta, the town residence since time immemorial of the family of that name. There are servants at the door, there are servants on the broad marble staircase, there are servants everywhere! for the Spaniard is unapproachable in the gentle art of leaving things to others. In the *patio*, or marble courtyard, there plays a monotonous little fountain, peacefully plashing away the sunny hours.

In England el Señor Conde de Lloseta de Mallorca would be looked upon as a mystery, because he lived in a large house by himself; because it was not known what his tastes might be; because the interviewer interviewed him not, and because the Society rags had no opportunity of describing his drawing-room.

In Spain things are different. If the count chose to live in his own cellar, his neighbours would shrug their shoulders and throw the end of their *capa* well over to the back. That was surely the business of the count.

Moreover, Cipriani de Lloseta was not the sort of man of whom it is easy to ask questions. His was the pride of pride, which is a vice unbreakable. When the Moors went to Majorca in the eighth century, they found Llosetas there, and Llosetas were left behind eight hundred years later, when the southern conqueror was driven back to his dark land. Among his friends it is known that Cipriani de Lloseta lived alone because he was faithful to the memory of one who, but for the hand of God, would have lived with him until she was an old woman, filling, perhaps, the great gloomy house in the Calle de la Paz with the prattle of children's voices, with the clatter of childish feet in the marble passages.

The younger women looked at him surreptitiously, and asked each other what sort of wife this must have been; while their elders shrugged their ample shoulders with a strange little Catalonian contraction of the eyes, and said—

"It is not so much the woman herself as that which the man makes her."

For they are wise, these stout and elderly ladies. They were once young, and they learnt the lesson.

This man, Cipriani de Lloseta, leads a somewhat lonely life, inasmuch as he associates but little with the men of his rank and station. It is, for instance, known that he walks on the Rambla, but no one of any importance whatever, no one that is likely to recognize him, is aware of the fact that another favourite promenade of his is the Muelle de Ponente, that forsaken pier where the stone works are and where no one ever promenades. Here Cipriani de Lloseta walks gravely in the evening—to be more precise, on Tuesday or Friday evening—about five o'clock, when the boat sails for Majorca.

He stands, a lonely, cloaked figure, at the end of the long stone pier, and his dark Spanish eyes rest on the steamer as it glides away into the darkening east and south.

Often, often this man watches the boats depart, but he never goes himself. Often, often he gazes out in his chastened, impenetrable silence over the horizon, as if seeking to pierce the distance and look on the bare heights of the far-off island.

For there, over the glassy smoothness of the horizon, behind those little grey clouds is Majorca—and Lloseta.

Lloseta, a bare, brown village, standing on the hillside, as if it had economically crept up there among the pines,

so as to leave available for cultivation every inch of the wonderful soil of the plain. Below, the vast fertile plateau, tilled like a garden, lies to the westward, while to the east the rising undulations terminate in the bare uplands of Inca. Olive-trees cover the plain like an army, trees that were planted by the Moors a thousand years ago.

Behind—the rugged heights of the mountains, here at their highest, and, in the fastness of a gorge lies Lloseta itself.

From the heights above a subtle invigorating odour of marjoram, rosemary, lavender, growing wild like heather, comes down to mingle with the more languid breath of tropic plant and flower.

Such is Lloseta—a home to live for, to die for, to dream of when away from it. As a man is dreaming of it now, just across that hundred miles of smooth sea, on the end of the Muelle de Ponente at Barcelona.

He is always dreaming of it—in Spain, where he is a Spaniard—in England, where he might be an Englishman. It is not every one of us who has a home from whence his name is derived, who signs his letters with a word that is marked upon the map.

Such is Cipriani of that name, who has now left the Rambla and is wandering along the deserted pier.

The steamer has loosed its moorings, is slowly picking its way out of the crowded harbour, and it will pass the pier-head by the time that Cipriani de Lloseta reaches that point.

The man walks slowly, cloaked to the mouth, for the evening breeze is chilly. He gravely descends the steps and begins to walk on the little path around the circular tower at the end of the pier. He usually stands at the very end, so as to be as near to Majorca as possible, one might almost think.

He gravely walks on, and quite suddenly he comes upon a youthful Briton smoking a cigar and dangling a thick stick.

"Ah!" the two men exclaim.

"What are you doing in Barcelona?" asks the Spaniard.

"The devil only knows, my dear man. I don't."

"I hope he had nothing to do with your coming here —idle hands, you know."

The Englishman sat gravely down on a small granite column and reflected.

"No," he answered after a pause, "it was not that. I left England because I wanted to get away from—— Well, from an old woman who wants me to marry her daughter. I went to Monte Carlo, and, if you don't mind my saying so, I'm hanged if she didn't follow me, bringing the poor girl with her."

The Spaniard smiled gravely.

"A willing victim!"

"No, Lloseta, you're wrong there. That's the beastly part of it. That girl, sir, was actually shivering with fright one night when the old woman managed to leave us on the terrace together. Some one else, you know!"

The dark eyes looking across towards Majorca were not pleasant to contemplate.

"However," pursued the ingenuous *parti*, "I spoke to her as one might have done to another chap, you know. I said, 'You're frightened of something.' She didn't answer. 'You're afraid that I'm going to ask you to marry me.' 'Yes,' she answered. 'Well, I'm not. I'm not such a cad.' And after that we got on all right. She would have told who it was if I had let her."

"Two days later I sloped off here. Spain choked her off—the old lady, I mean."

Lloseta laughed, and the young man began to think that he had said something rude.

"She did not know what a nice place it is," he added, with a transparency which did no harm. "Yes, you're right. The devil had something to do with my coming here. Match-making old women are the devil."

He paused and attended to his cigar. The steamer passed within a hundred yards of them.

The Englishman nodded towards it.

"Steamer's going to Majorca," he said.

Lloseta nodded his head.

"Yes," he answered gravely, "I know."

"I came down to see it off!"

The Spaniard looked at him sharply.

"Why?" he asked.

"I know an old chap on board—going across to fetch an English girl, a Miss Challoner. Her father's dead."

Lloseta said nothing. Presently he turned to go, and as they walked back together he arranged to send a carriage for the Englishman and his luggage to bring him to the big house in the Street of the Peace, which he explained with a shadowy smile was more comfortable than the hotel.

"So," he said to himself, as he walked towards his vast home alone, "so the Caballero Challoner is dead. They are passing off the stage one by one."

CHAPTER V

THE VALLEY OF REPOSE

"A home where exiled angels might forbear
Awhile to moan for paradise."

THERE is a valley far up in the mountains behind the ancient city of Palma—the Val d'Erraha. Some thousand years ago the Arabs found this place. After toils and labours, and many battles by sea and land, a roaming sheikh settled here, calling it El Rahah—the Repose.

He dug a well—for where the Moor has been there is always sparkling water—he planted olive trees, and he built a mill. The well is there to-day; the olive trees, old and huge and gnarled as are no other olive trees on the earth, yield their yearly crop unceasingly; the mill grinds the Spaniard's corn to-day.

In the Val d'Erraha there stands a house—a rambling, ungainly Farm, as such are called in Majorca. It runs off at strange angles, presenting a broken face to all points of the compass. From a distance it rather resembles a village, for the belfry of the little chapel is visible and the buildings seem to be broken up and divided. On closer inspection it is found to be self-

contained, and a nearer approach discloses the fact that it presents to the world four solid walls, and that it is only to be entered by an arched gateway.

In the centre of the open *patio* stands the Moorish well, surrounded, overhung by orange trees. This house could resist a siege—indeed, it was built for that purpose; for the Moorish pirates made raids on the island almost within the memory of living persons.

Such is the Casa d'Erraha—the House of Repose. It stands with its back to the pine slopes, looking peacefully down the valley, over terraces where grow the orange, the almond, the fig, the lemon, the olive; and far below, where the water trickles, the feathery bamboo.

The city of Palma is but a few miles away, in its strong thirteenth-century restriction within high ramparts. It has its cathedral, its court-house—all the orthodox requirements of a city, and, moreover, it is the capital of the whilom kingdom of Majorca. King Jaime is dead and gone. Majorca, after many vicissitudes, has settled down into an obscure possession of Spain; and to the old-world ways of that country it has taken very kindly.

But with the unwritten history of Majorca we have little to do, and we have much with the Casa d'Erraha and the owner thereof—a plain Englishman of the name of Challoner—the last of his line, the third of his race, to own the Casa d'Erraha.

Edward Challoner lay on his bed in the large room overlooking the valley and the distant sea. In the House

of Repose he lay awaiting the call to a longer rest than earthly weariness can secure. The grave old Padre of the neighbouring village of St. Pablo stood near the bed. Eve Challoner had sent for him, with the instinct that makes us wish to be seen off on a long journey by a good man, of whatsoever creed or calling.

At times the old priest gently patted the hand of Eve Challoner as she stood by his side.

Climate and country and habit have a greater influence over the human frame than we ever realize. Eve Challoner had been subject to these subtle influences to a rare extent. Born in Majorca, of English parents, she had inhaled some of the inimitable grace of Majorcan maidenhood. It was, of course, a mere chance that her hair was black, but it was not entirely chance that it should be long and thick and rich, hanging in a great plait down her back, as all Majorcan maidens wear it. Tall and upright, clad in black, as all Spanish ladies are, she was English and yet Spanish. Of a wonderfully clear white, her skin was touched slightly by the sun and the warm air which blows ever from the sea, blow which way it may across the little island.

Romance tells of Andalusian beauty, of Catalonian grace—and in sober British earnest (a solid thing) there are few more beautiful women than high-born Spanish ladies. Eve Challoner had caught something—some trick of the head—which belongs to Spain alone. Her eyes had a certain northern vivacity of glance, a small something which is noticeable enough in Southern Europe,

though we should hardly observe it in England, for it means education. In the matter of learning, be it noted in passing, the ladies of the Peninsula are not so very far above their duskier sisters of the harem farther east.

The girl's eyes were dull now, with a sort of surprised anguish, for sorrow had come to her before its time. The man lying on the bed before her had not reached the limit of his years. Quite suddenly, twelve hours before, he had complained of a numb feeling in his head, and the voice he spoke in was thick and strange. In a surprisingly short time Edward Challoner was no longer himself—no longer the cynical, polished gentleman of the world—but a hard-breathing, inert deformity, hardly human. From that time to this he had never spoken, and Heaven knew there was enough for him to say. Death had caught him unawares—as, after all, he generally does catch us. There were several things to set in order as usual; for it is only in books and on the stage that folks make a graceful exit, clearing up the little mystery, forgiving the wrongs, boasting with feeble voice of the good they have done—with lowering tone and soft music slowly working together to the prompter's bell. It is not in real life that dying men find much time to prattle about their own souls. They usually want all their breath for those they leave behind. And who knows! Perhaps those waiting on the other side think no worse of the man who dies fearing for others and not for himself.

In Edward Challoner's paralyzed brain there was a

great wish to speak to his daughter, but the words would not come. He looked at those around him with a dreamy indistinctness as from a distance, almost as if he had begun his long journey and was looking back from afar.

And so the afternoon wore on to the short southern twilight, and the goat-bells came tinkling up from the valley—for nature must have her way though men may die, and milking-time rules through all the changes.

While the light failed over the land two men were riding through it as fast as horse could lay hoof to the ground. They were on the small road running from the Soller highway up to the Val d'Erraha, and he who led the way seemed to know every inch of it. This was Henry FitzHenry, and his companion, ill at ease in a Spanish saddle, was the doctor of Her Majesty's gunboat *Kittiwake*.

Four months earlier, by one of those chances which seem no chance when we look back to them, the *Kittiwake* had broken down on leaving the anchorage of Port Mahon. Towed back by a consort, she had been there ever since, awaiting some necessary pieces of machinery to be made in England and sent out to her. Hearing by chance that the navigating lieutenant of the *Kittiwake* was Henry FitzHenry—usually known as Fitz—Mr. Challoner had written to Minorca from the larger island, introducing himself as the Honourable Mrs. Harrington's cousin, and offering what poor hospitality the Val d'Erraha had to dispense.

In a little island there is not very much to talk about, and the gossips of Majorca had soon laid hold of Fitz. They said that the English señorita up at the Casa d'Erraha had found a lover, and a fine, handsome one at that; else, they opined, why should this English sailor thrash his boat through any weather from Cuidadela in Minorca to Soller in Majorca, riding subsequently from that small and lovely town over the roughest country in the island to the Valley of Repose as if the devil were at his heels. That was only their way of saying it, for they knew as well as any of us that love in front can make us move more quickly than ever the devil from behind.

At Alcudia they watched his boat labour through the evil seas. The wind was never too boisterous for him, the waves never too high.

"It is," they said, "the English mariner from Mahon going to see the Señorita Challoner. Ah! but he has a firm hand."

And they smiled dreamily with their deep eyes, as knowing the malady themselves.

This time there had been two figures clad in black oilskin in the stern of the long white boat. Two horses had been ordered by cable to be ready at Soller instead of one. For Eve Challoner had telegraphed to her countrymen at Port Mahon when this strange and horrid numbness seized her father.

The sun was setting behind the distant line of the sea when Fitz and his companion urged their tired horses

up the last slope to the Casa d'Erraha. Within the gateway Mrs. Baines, the only English servant in this English house, was awaiting them. She curtseyed in an old-fashioned way to the doctor, who had not seen an Englishwoman's face for two years and more, and asked him to follow her. Fitz did not offer to accompany them—indeed, he made it quite obvious that he did not want to do so. Two of the vague attendants who are always to be found in their numbers about the doorway and stable-yard of a Spanish country-house took the horses, and Fitz wandered round the *patio* to the southern door which led to the terrace.

There was not very much change in Henry FitzHenry since we saw him in Mrs. Harrington's drawing-room six years earlier. The promise of the boy had been fulfilled by the man, and here was a quiet Englishman, chiefly remarkable for a certain directness of purpose which was his, and seemed to pervade his being. Here was one who had commanded men—who had directed skilled labour for the six impressionable years of his life. And he who directs skilled labour is apt to differ in manner, in thought and habit, from him whose commands are obeyed mechanically.

The naval officer is a man of detail—he tells others to do that which they know he can do better himself.

They said on board the *Kittiwake*, which was a small ship, that Fitz—"old" Fitz, they used to call him—was too big for a seafaring life. In height he was nearly six feet—six feet of spare muscle and bone—such a man

as one sees on the north-east coast of England, the east coast of Scotland, or the west coast of Norway—anywhere, in fact, where the Vikings passed.

The deep blue eyes had acquired a certain quiet which had been absent in the boyish face—the quiet that comes of a burden on the heart; of the certain knowledge that the burden can never be removed. Luke's life was not the only one that had been spoiled by an examination paper. Examination papers have spoilt more lives than they have benefited. A twin brother is something more than a brother, and Fitz went through life as if one side of him was suffering a dull, aching pain. The face of this man walking alone on the terrace of the House of Repose was not happy. Perhaps it was too strong for complete happiness—some men are so, and others are too wise. This was the face, not of a very wise or a brilliant man, but of one who was strong and simple—something in the nature of a granite rock. Sandstone is more easily shaped into a thing of beauty, but it is also the sandstone that is worn by weather, while a deep mark cut on granite stays there till the end.

Fitz had no intention of going upstairs. He was not a man to take the initiative in social matters. His instinct told him that if Eve wanted him she would send for him. She had cabled to him to bring the doctor. He had brought the doctor, and now he went out on the terrace to "stand by," as he put it to himself, for further orders. If, as the gossips averred, he was the señorita's lover, he deemed it wiser to relinquish that position just now.

As a matter of fact, however, no word of love had passed between them.

Fitz was standing by the low wall of the terrace looking down into the hazy, dim depths of the valley, when the further orders which he awaited came to him.

Hearing a light step on the pavement behind him, he turned, and faced Eve, who was running towards him.

"Will you come upstairs?" she said. "I think he wants to see you."

"Certainly," he answered.

She had hurried out, but they walked back rather slowly. Nevertheless, they did not seem to have anything to say to each other.

When they entered the room upstairs together, a faint little smile full of wisdom hovered for a second round the old priest's clean-shaven lips.

The dying man had evidently wanted something or some one. The old priest knew human nature, hence the little shadowy smile called up by Eve's transparently partial interpretation of her father's desire.

Edward Challoner looked at him, but did not appear to recognize his face. It seemed that he had left the earth so far behind now that the faces of those walking on it were no longer distinguishable.

He gave a little half-pettish groan, and a stillness came over the room.

The old padre and the doctor, who did not know a word of any common language, exchanged a glance, and in a very business-like way, as of one whose trade it was,

the priest got down upon his knees. Then the doctor, half-shyly, approached Eve, and taking her by the arm, led her gently out of the room.

Fitz stayed where he was, standing by the dead man, looking down at the priest's bowed head, while the bell of the little chapel attached to the Casa d'Erraha told the valley that a good man had gone to his rest.

CHAPTER VI

AN ACTOR PASSES OFF THE STAGE

"We pass; the path that each man trod
Is dim, or will be dim, with weeds."

THE priest was the first to speak.

"You are his friend, I also; but we are of different nations."

He paused, drawing the sheet up over the dead man's face.

"He was not of my church. You have your ways; will you make the arrangements?"

"Yes," replied Fitz, simply, "if you like."

"It is better so, my son"—the padre took a pinch of snuff—"because—he was not of my church. You will stay here, you and your friend. She, the Señorita Eve, cannot be left alone, with her grief."

He spoke Spanish, knowing that the Englishman understood it.

They drew down the blinds and passed out on to the terrace, where they walked slowly backwards and forwards, talking over the future of Eve and of the Casa d'Erraha.

In Spain, as in other southern lands, they speed the parting guest. Two days later Edward Challoner was laid beside his father and grandfather in the little churchyard in the valley below the Casa d'Erraha. And who are we that we should say that his chance of reaching heaven was diminished by the fact that part of the Roman Catholic burial service was read over him by a Spanish priest?

Fitz had telegraphed to Eve's only living relative, Captain Bontnor, and Fitz it was who stayed on at the Casa d'Erraha until that mariner should arrive; for the doctor was compelled to return to his ship at Port Mahon, and the priest never slept in another but his own little vicarage house.

And in the Casa d'Erraha was enacted at this time one of those strange little comedies that will force themselves upon a tragic stage. Fitz deemed it correct that he should avoid Eve as much as possible, and Eve, on the other hand, feeling lonely and miserable, wanted the society of the simple-minded young sailor.

"Why do you always avoid me?" she asked suddenly on the evening after the funeral. He had gone out on to the terrace, and thither she followed him in innocent anger, without afterthought. She stood before him with her slim white hands clasped together, resting against her black dress, a sombre, slight young figure in the moonlight, looking at him with reproachful eyes.

He hesitated a second before answering her. She was only nineteen; she had been born and brought up in the

Valley of Repose amidst the simple islanders. She knew nothing of the world and its ways. And Fitz, with the burden of the unique situation suddenly thrust upon him, was, in his chivalrous youthfulness, intensely anxious to avoid giving her anything to look back to in after years when she should be a woman. He was tenderly solicitous for the feelings which would come later, though they were absent now.

"Because," he answered, "I am not good at saying things. I don't know how to tell you how sorry I am for you."

She turned away and looked across to the hills at the other side of the valley, a rugged outline against the sky.

"But I know all that," she said softly, "without being told."

A queer smile passed over his sunburnt face, as if she had unintentionally and innocently made things more difficult for him.

"And," she continued, "it is—oh, so lonely.

She made an almost imperceptible little movement towards him. Like the child that she was, she was yearning for sympathy and comfort.

"I know—I know," he said, standing his ground like a man.

Outward circumstance was rather against Fitz. A clear, odorous Spanish night, the young moon rising behind the pines, a thousand dreamy tropic scents filling the air. And Eve, half-tearful, wholly lovable,

standing before him, innocently treading on dangerous ground, guilelessly asking him to love her.

She, having grown almost to womanhood, pure as the flowers of the field, ignorant, a child, knew nothing of what she was doing. She merely gave way to the instinct that was growing within her—the instinct that made her turn to this man, claiming his strength, his tenderness, his capability, as given to him for her use and for her happiness.

"You must not avoid me," she said. "Why do you do it? Have I done anything you dislike? I have no one to speak to, no one who understands, but you. There is the padre, of course—and nurse; but they do not understand. They are—so *old!* Let me stay here with you until it is time to go to bed, will you?"

"Of course," he answered quietly. "If you care to. To-morrow I should think we shall hear from your uncle. He may come by the boat sailing from Barcelona to-morrow night. It will be a good thing if he does; you see I must get back to my ship."

"You said she would not be ready for sea till next month."

"No, but there is discipline to be thought of."

He looked past her, up to the stars, with a scrutinizing maritime eye, recognizing them and naming them to himself. He did not meet her eyes—dangerous, tear-laden.

"There is something the matter with you," she said. "You are different. Yes, you want my uncle to come

the day after to-morrow—you want to go away to Mahon as soon as you can. I—— Oh, Fitz, I don't want to be a coward!"

She stood in front of him, clenching her little fists, forcing back the tears that gleamed in the moonlight. He did not dare to cease his astronomical observations.

"I *won't* be a coward—if you will only speak. If you will tell me what it is."

Then Fitz told his first deliberate lie.

"I have had bad news," he said, "about my brother Luke. I am awfully anxious about him."

He did it very well; for his motive was good. And we may take it that such a lie as this is not writ very large in the Book.

The girl paused for a little, and then deliberately wiped the tears from her eyes.

"How horribly selfish I have been!" she said. "Why did you not tell me sooner? I have only been thinking of my own troubles ever since—ever since poor papa—— I am a selfish wretch! I hate myself! Tell me about your brother."

And so they walked slowly up and down the moss-grown terrace—alone in this wonderful tropic night—while he told her the little tragedy of his life. He told the story simply, with characteristic gaps in the sequence, which she was left to fill up from her imagination.

"I shall not like Mrs. Harrington," said Eve, when the story was told. "I am glad that she cannot come much into my life. My father wanted me to go and

stay with her last summer, but I would not leave him alone, and for some reason he would not accept the invitation for himself. Do you know, Fitz, I sometimes think there is a past—some mysterious past—which contained my father and Mrs. Harrington and a man—the Count de Lloseta."

"I have seen him," put in Fitz, "at Mrs. Harrington's often."

The girl nodded her head with a quaint little assumption of shrewdness and deep suspicion.

"My father admired him—I do not know why. And pitied him intensely—I do not know why."

"He was always very nice to me," answered Fitz, "but I never understood him."

Talking thus they forgot the flight of time. It sometimes happens thus in youth. And the huge clock in the stable yard striking ten aroused Eve suddenly to the lateness of the hour.

"I must go," she said. "I am glad you told me about—Luke. I feel as if I knew you better and understood—a little more. Good night."

She left him on the terrace, and walked sorrowfully away to the house which could never be the same again.

Fitz watched her slight young form disappear through an open doorway, and then he became lost in the contemplation of the distant sea, lying still and glass-like in the moonlight. He was looking to the north, and it happened that from that same point of the compass

there was coming towards him the good steamer *Bellver*, on whose deck stood a little shock-headed man—Captain Bontnor.

There is a regular service of steamers to and from the Island of Majorca to the mainland, and in addition, steamers make voyages when pressure of traffic may demand. The *Bellver* was making one of these supplemental journeys, and her arrival was not looked for at Palma.

Eve and Fitz were having breakfast alone in the gloomy room overshadowed by the trailing wings of the Angel of Death, when the servant announced a gentleman to see the señorita. The señorita requested that the gentleman might approach, and presently there stood in the doorway the quaintest little figure imaginable.

Captain Bontnor, with a certain sense of the fitness of things, had put on his best clothes for this occasion, and it happened that the most superior garment in his wardrobe was a thick pilot jacket, which stood out from his square person with solid angularity. He had brushed his hair very carefully, applying water to compass a smoothness which had been his life-long and hitherto unattained aim. His shock hair—red turning to grey—stood up four inches from his honest, wrinkled face. It was unfortunate that his best garments should have been purchased for the amenities of a northern climate. His trousers were as stiff as his jacket, and he wore a decorous black silk tie as large as a counterpane.

He stood quaintly bowing in the doorway, his bright

blue eyes veiled with shyness and a pathetic dumb self-consciousness.

"Please come in," said Eve in Spanish, quite at a loss as to who this might be.

Then Fitz had an inspiration. Something of the sea seemed to be wafted from the older to the younger sailor.

"Are you Captain Bontnor?" he asked, rising from the table.

"Yes, sir, yes! That's my name!"

He stood nervously in the doorway, mistrusting the parquet-floor, mistrusting himself, mistrusting everything.

Fitz went towards him holding out his hand, which the captain took after a manfully repressed desire to wipe his own broad palm on the seam of his trousers.

"Then you are my uncle?" said Eve, coming forward.

"Yes, miss, I'm afraid—that is—yes, I'm your uncle. You see—I'm only a rough sort of fellow."

He came a little nearer and held his arms apart, looking down at his own person in humble deprecation.

Eve was holding out her hand. He took it with a vague, deep-rooted chivalry, and she, stooping, very deliberately kissed him.

This seemed rather to bewilder the captain, for he shook hands again with Fitz.

"I——" he began, nodding into Fitz's face. "You are—eh? I didn't expect—to see—I didn't know——"

At that moment Eve saw. It came to her in a flash,

as most things do come to women. She even had time to doubt the story about Luke.

"This," she said, with crimson cheeks, "is Mr. Fitz-Henry of the *Kittiwake*. He kindly came to us in our trouble. You will have to thank him afterwards—uncle."

"And in the mean time I expect you want breakfast?" put in Fitz, carefully avoiding Eve.

"Yes," added the girl, "of course. Sit down. No here!"

"Thankye—thankye, miss—my dear, I mean. Oh, anything 'll do for me. A bit of bread and a cup o' tea. I had a bit and a sup on board before she sheered alongside the quay."

He looked round rather helplessly, wondering where he should put his hat—a solid, flat-crowned British affair. Eve took it from him and laid it aside.

Captain Bontnor sat very stiffly down. His square form did not seem to lose any of its height by the change of position, and with a stiff back he looked admiringly round the room, waiting like a child at a school treat.

As the meal progressed he grew more at ease, telling them of the little difficulties of his journey, avoiding with a tact not always found inside a better coat all mention of the sad event which had caused him to take this long journey after his travelling days were done.

That which set him at ease more than all else was the

fact, at length fully grasped, that Fitz was, like himself, a sailor. Here at least was a topic upon which he could converse with any man. General subjects only were discussed, as if by tacit consent. No mention was made of the future until this was somewhat rudely brought before their notice by the announcement that a second visitor desired to see the señorita.

With a more assured manner than that of his predecessor, a small, dark man came into the room, throwing off his cloak and handing it to the servant. He bowed ceremoniously and with true Spanish grace to Eve, with less ceremony and more dignity to the two men.

"I beg that your excellency will accept the sympathy of my deepest heart," he said. "I regret to trouble you so soon after the great loss sustained by your excellency, indeed, by the whole island of Majorca. But it is a matter of business. Such things cannot be delayed. Have I your excellency's permission to proceed?"

"Certainly, señor."

The man's clean-shaven face was like a mask. The expressions seemed to come and go as if worked by machinery. Sympathy was turned off, and in its place Polite-Attention-to-Business appeared. From under his arm he drew a leather portfolio, which he placed upon the table.

"The affairs of the late Cavalier Challoner were perhaps known to your excellency?"

"No; I knew nothing of my father's affairs."

Sympathy seemed to be struggling behind "Polite-

Attention-to-Business," while for a moment a real look of distress flitted over the parchment face. He paused for an instant, reflecting while he assorted his papers.

"I am," he said, "the lawyer of his excellency, the Count de Lloseta."

Eve and Fitz exchanged a glance, and as silence was kept the lawyer went on.

"Three generations ago," he said, "a Count de Lloseta, the grandfather of this present excellency, made over on 'rotas' the estate and house known as the Val d'Erraha to the grandfather of the late Cavalier Challoner—a Captain Challoner, one of Admiral Byng's men."

Again he paused, arranging his papers.

"The Majorcan system 'rotas' is known to your excellency?"

"No, señor."

"On this system an estate is made over for one or two or three generations by the proprietor to the lessee who farms or sublets the land, and in lieu of rent hands over to the proprietor a certain proportion of the crops. Does your excellency follow me?"

Eve did not answer at once. Then the lawyer's meaning seemed to dawn upon her.

"Then," she said, "the Casa d'Erraha never belonged to my father?"

"Never"—with a grave bow.

"And I have nothing—nothing at all! I am penniless?"

The lawyer looked from her to Fitz, who was standing

beside her listening to the conversation, but not offering to take part in it.

"Unless your excellency has private means — in England, perhaps."

"I do not know—I know nothing. And we must leave the Casa d'Erraha. When, señor? Tell me when."

The lawyer avoided her distressed eyes.

"Well," he said slowly, "the law is rather summary. I—your excellency understands I only do my duty. I am not the principal. I have no authority whatever—except the law."

"You mean that I must go at once?"

The lawyer's parchment face was generously expressive of grief now.

"Excellency, the lease terminated at the death of the late Caballero Challoner."

Eve stood for a moment, breathing hard. Fate seemed suddenly to have turned against her at every point. At this moment Captain Bontnor made bold—one could see him doing it—to take her hand.

"My dear," he said, "I don't quite understand what this foreign gentleman and you are talkin' about. But if it's trouble, dear, if it's trouble—just let me try."

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CHAPTER VII

IN THE STREET OF THE PEACE

"Measure thy life by loss instead of gain,
Not by the wine drunk, but the wine poured forth."

"My dear Miss Challoner,—I learn that you are in Barcelona, and at the same time I find with some indignation that my lawyer in Mallorca, with a deplorable excess of zeal, has been acting without my orders in respect to the property of the Val d'Erraha. I hasten to place myself and possessions at your disposition, and take the liberty of writing to request an interview, instead of calling on you at your hotel, for reasons which you will readily understand, knowing as you do the gossiping ways of hotels. As an old friend of your father's, and one who moved and lived in neighbourly intercourse with him before your birth, and before the deplorable death of your mother, I now waive ceremony, and beg that you and your uncle will come and take tea with me this afternoon at my humble abode in the 'Calle de la Paz.'

"Believe me, dear Miss Challoner,

"Yours very sincerely,

"Cipriani de Lloseta de Mallorca."

Eve read this letter in her room in the hotel of the Four Nations at Barcelona. She had only been on the mainland twenty-four hours when it was delivered to her by a servant of the Count's, who came to her apartment and delivered it into her own hands, as is the custom of Spanish servants.

Eve Challoner had grown older during the last few days. She had been brought face to face with life as it really is, and not as we dream it in the dreams of youth. She was not surprised to receive this letter, although she had no idea that the Count de Lloseta was in Spain. But the varying emotions of the last week had, as it were, undermined the confident hopefulness with which we look forward when we are young, and sometimes when we are old, to the management of our own lives here below. She was beginning to understand certain terms which she had heard applied to human existence, and to which she had hitherto attached no special meaning as relating to herself. More especially did she understand at this time that life may be compared to a stream, for she was vaguely conscious of drifting she knew not whither.

Fitz had come suddenly into her life; Captain Bontnor had come into it; and now this man, Cipriani de Lloseta, seemed to be asserting his right to come into it too. And she did not know quite what to do with them all. She had never, in the quiet, dreamy days of her youth, pictured a life with any of these men in it, and the future was suddenly tremendous, unfathomable.

There were vast possibilities in it of misery, of danger, of difficulty; and behind these a vague, new feeling of a possible happiness far exceeding the happiness of her peaceful childhood.

Without consulting her uncle, who had gone out into the street to walk backwards and forwards before the door, as he had walked backwards and forwards on his deck for forty years, she sat down and accepted the Count's informal invitation. She seemed to do it without reflection, as if impelled thereto by something stronger than *pro* or *con*, as if acknowledging the Spaniard's right to come into her life, bringing to bear upon it an influence which she never attempted to fathom.

Thus it came about that Eve and Captain Bontnor found themselves awaiting their host in the massive, gloomy drawing-room of the Palace in the Calle de la Paz at five o'clock that afternoon.

Captain Bontnor had learnt a great deal during the last few days; among other things he had learnt to love his niece with a simple, dog-like devotion, which had a vein of pathos in it for those who see such things. He placed himself well behind Eve, and looked around him with a wondering awe.

"I think, my dear," he said, "that it would have been better if you had come alone. I—you know I am getting too old to learn manners now—eh—he! he! Yes. Having been so long at sea, you know."

"I think the sea teaches men manners, uncle," said

Eve, with a little smile which he did not understand. "At any rate," she went on, touching his rough sleeve affectionately, "it teaches them something that I like."

"Does it, now? What now? Tell me."

"I do not know," answered the girl, as if speaking to herself, and at this moment the door was opened.

The man who came in was of medium height, with a long, narrow face, and singularly patient eyes.

"I should have known you," he said, approaching Eve, and holding out his hand. "You do not remember your mother? I do, however. You are like her—and she was a good woman. And this is Captain Bontnor—your uncle."

He shook hands with the old sailor without the faintest flicker of surprise at his somewhat incongruous appearance.

"I am glad," he said suavely, "to make Captain Bontnor's acquaintance."

He turned to draw forward a chair, and the light from the high, barred window falling full on his head, betrayed the fact that his hair, close cut as an English soldier's, was touched and flecked with grey. His lithe youthfulness of frame rather surprised Eve, who knew him to be a contemporary of her father's.

"It is very good of you to come," he went on in a low voice. "I took the privilege of the elder generation, you see! Captain, pray take that chair."

He did the honours with a British ease of manner, strangely touched by a Spanish dignity.

"When I heard of your great bereavement," he said, turning to Eve with a grave bow, "I ought perhaps to have gone to Mallorca at once to offer you what poor assistance was in my power. But circumstances, over which I had no control, prevented my doing so. My offer of help is tardy, I know, but it is none the less sincere."

"Thank you," replied Eve, conscious of a feeling of pleasant reliance in this new-found ally. "But I have good friends—the Padre Fortis, my uncle, and—a friend of ours, Mr. FitzHenry."

"Of the *Kittiwake*—at Mahon?"

"Yes."

"I have the pleasure of knowing Mr. FitzHenry," murmured the Count. "Now," he said, with a sudden smile which took her by surprise by reason of the alteration it made in the whole man, "will you do me a great favour?"

"I should like to," answered Eve, with some hesitation.

"And you?" said the Count, turning to Captain Bontnor.

"Oh yes," replied that sailor bluntly, "if it's possible."

"I want you," continued the Count de Lloseta, "to forget that this is the first time we meet, and to look upon me as a friend—one of the most intimate—of your father."

"My father," said the girl, "always spoke of you as such."

"Indeed, I am glad of that. Now, tell me, who have you in the world besides Captain Bontnor?"

"I have no one. But——"

"We was thinking," put in the Captain, in ungrammatical haste, "that Eve would come and live with me. It isn't a grand house—just a little cottage. But such as it is, she'll have a kindly welcome."

"And, I have no doubt, a happy home," added the Count, with one of his dark smiles. "I was merely wondering whether Miss Challoner intended to live in the Casa d'Erraha or to let it?"

Eve looked up in surprise, and Captain Bontnor's blue eyes wandered from her face to the dark and courteous countenance of Cipriani de Lloseta.

"Perhaps," continued the Spaniard imperturbably, "you have not yet made up your mind on the subject."

"But the Casa d'Erraha does not belong to me," said Eve, and Captain Bontnor wagged his head in confirmation. "Your own lawyer explained to me that my father only held it on 'rotas.'"

"My own lawyer, my dear young lady, thereby proved himself an ass."

"But," said Eve, somewhat mystified, "the Val d'Erraha belongs to you, and you must know it. I have no title deeds—I have nothing."

"Except possession, which is nine points of the law. Will you take tea, and cream? I do not know how many points the law has, but one would naturally conclude that nine is a large proportion of the whole."

While he spoke he was pouring out the tea. He handed a cup to her with a grave smile, as if the matter under discussion were one of a small and passing importance.

"I suppose," he added, "you have learnt to love the Casa d'Erraha. It is a place—a place one might easily become attached to. Do you know"—he turned his back to her, busying himself with the silver teapot—"Lloseta?" he added jerkily.

"Yes. My father and I used to go there very often."

"Ah——" He waited—handing Captain Bontnor a cup of tea in silence. But Eve was not thinking of Lloseta; she was thinking of the Casa d'Erraha.

"My father did not speak to me of his affairs," she said. "He was naturally rather reserved, and—and it was very sudden."

"Yes. So I learnt. That indeed is my excuse for intruding myself upon your notice at this time. I surmised that my poor friend's affairs had been left in some confusion. He was too thorough a gentleman to be competent in affairs. I thought that perhaps my small influence and my diminutive knowledge of Majorcan law—the Roman law, in point of fact—might be of some use to you."

"Thank you," she answered; "I think we settled everything before we left the island, although we did not see Señor Peña, your lawyer. I—the Casa d'Erraha belongs to you!" she added, suddenly descending to feminine reiteration.

"Prove it," said the Count, quietly.

"I cannot do that."

He shrugged his shoulders with a smile.

"Then," he said, "I am afraid you cannot shift your responsibility to my shoulders."

The girl looked at him with puzzled young eyes. He stood before her, dignified, eminently worthy of the great name he bore—a solitary, dark-eyed, inscrutable man, whose whole being subtly suggested hopelessness and an empty life. She shook her head.

"But I cannot accept the Casa d'Erraha on those terms."

The Count drew forward a chair and sat down.

"Listen," he said, with an explanatory forefinger upheld. "Three generations ago two men made a verbal agreement in respect to the estate of the Val d'Erraha. To-day no one knows what that agreement was. It may have been the ordinary 'rotas' of Minorca. It may not. In those days the English held Minorca; my ancestor may therefore have been indebted to your great grandfather, for we have some small estates in Minorca. You know what the islands are to-day. They are two hundred years behind Northern Europe. What must they have been a hundred and twenty years ago? We have no means of finding out what passed between your great-grandfather and my grandfather. We only know that three generations of Challoners have lived in the Casa d'Erraha, paying to the Counts of Lloseta a certain proportion of the product of the estate. I

do not mind telling you that the smallness of that proportion does away with the argument that the agreement was the ordinary 'rotas' of the Baleares. We know nothing—we can prove nothing. If you claimed the estate I might possibly wrest it from you—not by proof, but merely because the insular prejudice against a foreigner would militate against you in a Majorcan court of law. I cannot legally force you to hold the estate of the Val d'Erraha. I can only ask you as the daughter of one of my best friends to accept the benefit of a very small doubt."

Eva hesitated. What woman would not?

Captain Bontnor set down his cup very gravely on the table.

"I don't rightly understand," he said sturdily, "this 'rotas' business. But it seems to me pretty plain that the estate never belonged to my late brother-in-law Now what I say is, if the place belongs by right to Miss Challoner she'll take it. If it don't; well, then it don't, and she can't accept it as a present from anybody. Much obliged to you all the same."

The Count laughed pleasantly.

"My dear sir, it is not a present."

The Captain stuffed his hands very deeply into his pockets.

"Then it's worse—it's charity. And she has no need of that. Thank ye all the same," he replied.

He stared straight in front of him with the vague and rather painful suggestion of incapability that sometimes

came over him. He was wondering whether he was doing right in this matter.

"If," he added, half to himself, as a sort of afterthought on the crying question of ways and means—"if it comes to that, I can go to sea again. There's plenty would be ready to give me a ship."

The Count was still smiling.

"There is no question," he said, "of charity. What has Miss Challoner done that I should offer her that? I am in ignorance as to her affairs. I do not know the extent of her income."

"As far as we can make out," said Eve, gently, "there is nothing. But I can work. I thought that my knowledge of Spanish might enable me to make a living."

"No," said Captain Bontnor, "I'm d—— I mean I should not like you to go governessing, my dear."

The Count was apparently reflecting.

"I have a compromise to propose," he said, addressing himself to Eve. "If we place the property in the hands of a third person—you know the value of land in Majorca—to farm and tend; if at the end of each year the profits be divided between us?"

But Eve's suspicions were aroused, and her woman's instinct took her further than did Captain Bontnor's sturdy sense of right and wrong.

"I am afraid," she said, rising from her chair, "that I must refuse. I—I think I understand why papa always spoke of you as he did. I am very grateful to you. I know now that you have been trying to *give* me D'Erraha.

It was a generous thing to do—a most generous thing. I think people would hardly believe me if I told them. I can only thank you; for I have no possible means of proving to you how deeply I feel it. Somehow"—she paused, with tears and a sad little smile in her eyes—"somehow it is not the gift that I appreciate so much as—as your way of trying to give it."

The Spaniard spread out his two hands in deprecation. As she moved towards the door he took her gloved hand and raised it to his lips with a courtly grace.

"My child," he murmured gently, "I have not another word to say."

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEAL

"Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!"

A HOWLING gale of wind from the south-east, and driving snow and darkness. The light of Cap Grisnez struggling out over the blackness of the Channel, and the two Foreland lights twinkling feebly from their snow-clad heights. A night to turn in one's bed with a sleepy word of thanksgiving that one has a bed to turn in, and no pressing need to turn out of it.

The smaller fry of Channel shipping have crept into Dungeness or the Downs. Some of them have gone to the bottom. Two of them are breaking up on the Goodwins.

The *Croonah* Indian liner is pounding into it all, with white decks and whistling shrouds. The passengers are below in their berths. Some of them—and not only the ladies—are sending up little shamefaced supplications to One who watches over the traveller in all places and at all times.

And on the bridge of the *Croonah* a man all eyes and

stern resolve and maritime instinct. A man clad in his thickest clothes, and over all of them his black oilskins. A man with three hundred lives depending upon his keen eyes, his knowledge, and his judgment. A man whose name is Luke FitzHenry.

The captain has gone below for a few minutes to thaw, leaving the ship to FitzHenry. He does it with an easy conscience—as easy, that is, as the maritime conscience can well be in a gale of wind, with the Foreland lights ahead and infinite possibilities all around. The captain drinks his whisky and hot water with a certain slow appreciation of the merits of that reprehensible solution, and glances at the aneroid barometer on the bulkhead of his cabin.

Overhead, on the spidery bridge, far up in the howling night, Luke FitzHenry, returning from the enervating tropics, stares sternly into the night, heedless of the elemental warfare. For Luke FitzHenry has a grudge against the world, and people who have that take a certain pleasure in evil weather.

"The finest sailor that ever stepped," reflects the captain of his second officer—and he no mean mariner himself.

The *Croonah* had groped her way up Channel through a snowstorm of three days' duration, and the brunt of it had fallen by right of seniority on the captain and his second officer. Luke FitzHenry was indefatigable, and, better still, he was without enthusiasm. Here was the steady, unflinching combativeness which

alone can master the elements. Here was the true genius of the sea.

With his craft at his fingers' ends, Luke had that instinct of navigation by which some men seem to find their way upon the trackless waters. There are sailors who are no navigators—just as there are hunting men who cannot ride. There are navigators who will steer you from London to Petersburg without taking a sight, from the Thames to the Suez Canal without looking at their sextant. Such a sailor as this was Luke FitzHenry. Perfectly trained, he assimilated each item of experience with an insatiable greed for knowledge—and it was all maritime knowledge. He was a sailor and nothing else. But it is already something—as they say in France—to be a good sailor.

Luke FitzHenry was a man of middle height, sturdy, with broad shoulders and a slow step. His clean-shaven face was a long oval, with pessimistic, brooding eyes—eyes that saw everything except the small modicum of good which is in all human things, and to this they were persistently blind. Taking into consideration the small, set mouth, it was eminently a pugnacious face—a face that might easily degenerate to the coarseness of passion in the trough of a losing fight. But, fortunately, Luke's lines were cast upon the great waters, and he who fights the sea must learn to conquer, not by passionate effort, but by consistent, cool resolve. Those who worked with him feared him, and in so doing learnt the habit of his ways. The steersman, with one eye on the binnacle,

knew always where to find him with the other; for Luke hardly moved during his entire watch on deck. He took his station at the starboard end of the narrow bridge when he came on duty, and from that spot he rarely moved. These little things betray a man, if one only has the patience to piece them together.

Those who go down to the sea in ships, and even those who take their pleasure on the great water know the relative merits of the man who goes to his post and stays there, and of him who is all over the ship and restless.

Luke was standing now like a statue—black and gleaming amid the universal grey of the winter night, and his deep eyes, cat-like, pierced the surrounding gloom.

Here was a man militant. A man who must needs be fighting something, and Fate, with unusual foresight, had placed him in a position to fight Nature. Luke FitzHenry rather revelled in a night such as this—the gloom, the horror, and the patent danger of it suited his morose, combative nature. He loved danger and difficulty with the subtle form of love which a fighting man experiences for a relentless foe.

From light to light he pushed his intrepid way through the darkness and the bewildering intricacies of the Downs, and in due time, in the full sunlight of the next day, the *Croonah* sidled herself alongside the quay in the Tilbury Dock. The passengers, with their new lives before them, stumbled ashore, already forgetting the

men, who, smoke-begrimed and weary, had carried these lives within their hands during the last month or more. They crowded down the gangway and left Luke to go to his cabin.

There were two letters lying on the little table. One from Fitz at Mahon, the other in a handwriting which Luke had almost forgotten. He turned it over with the subtle smile of a man who has a grudge against women. But he opened it before the other.

"DEAR LUKE,—I am glad to hear from Fitz that you are making your way in the Merchant Service. He tells me that your steamer, the *Croonah*, has quite a reputation on the Indian route, and your fellow-officers are all gentlemen. I shall be pleased to see you to dinner the first evening you have at your disposal. I dine at seven-thirty.

"Believe me,

"Yours very truly,

"MARIA N. HARRINGTON.

"P.S.—I shall deem it a favour if you will come in dress clothes, as I have visitors."

And, strange to say, it was the feminine stab in the postscript that settled the matter. Luke sat down and wrote out a telegram at once, accepting Mrs. Harrington's invitation for the same evening.

When he rang the bell of the great house in Grosvenor Gardens at precisely half-past seven that evening, he

was conscious of a certain sense of elation. He knew himself to be well dressed—he was quite sure of himself—he felt that there could be no question as to his social standing.

He thought that the large drawing-room was empty when the butler ushered him into it, and some seconds elapsed before he discerned the form of a young lady in a deep chair near the fire.

The girl turned her head and rose from the chair with a smile and a certain grace of manner which seemed in some indefinite way to have been put on with her evening dress. For a moment Luke gazed at her, taken aback by her beauty. Then he bowed gravely, and she burst into a merry laugh.

"How funny!" she cried. "You do not know me?"

"No—o—o," he answered, searching his mind. For he was a passenger sailor, and many men and women crossed his path during the year.

She came forward with a coquettish little laugh and placed herself beneath the gas inviting his inspection, sure of herself, confident in her dressmaker.

She was small and very upright, with a peculiarly confident carriage of the head, which might indicate determination or, possibly, a mere resolution to get her money's worth. Her hair, perfectly dressed, was of the colour of a slow-worm. She called it fair. Her enemies said it reminded them of snakes. Her eyes were of a darker shade of ashen grey, verging on hazel. Her mouth was mobile, with thin lips and an expressive [illegible] the

left-hand corner—and at this moment it suggested pert inquiry. Some people thought she had an expressive face, but then some people are singularly superficial in their mode of observation. There was really no power of expressing any feeling in the small, delicately cut face. It all lay in the mouth, in the left-hand corner thereof. Her neck and arms were very white, a fact which she seemed to have taken into due consideration when consulting her dressmaker.

"Well?" she said, and Luke's wonder gradually faded into admiration.

"I give it up," he answered.

She shrugged her shoulders in pretended disgust.

"You are not polite," she said, with a glance at his stalwart person which might have indicated that there were atoning merits. "I must say you are not polite, Luke. I do not think I will tell you. It would be still more humiliating to learn that you have forgotten my existence."

"You cannot be Agatha!" he exclaimed.

"Can I not? It happens that I *am* Agatha Ingham-Baker—at your service!"

She swept him a low curtsey and sailed away to the mantelpiece, thereby giving him the benefit of the exquisite fit of her dress. She stood with one arm on the mantel-shelf, looking back at him over her shoulder, summing him up with a little introspective nod.

"I should like to know why I cannot be Agatha," she asked, with that keen feminine scent for a personality

which leads to the uttering of so much nonsense, and the brewing of so much mischief.

"I never thought——" he began.

"Yes?"

He laughed and refused to go any farther, although she certainly made the way easy for him.

"In fact," she said mockingly, "you are disappointed. You never expected me to turn out such a horrid——"

"You know it isn't that," he interrupted, with a flash of his gloomy eyes.

"Not now," she said quietly, glancing towards the door. "I hear Mrs. Harrington coming downstairs. You can tell me afterwards."

Luke turned on his heel and greeted Mrs. Harrington with quite a pleasant smile, which did not belong to her by rights, but to the girl behind him.

Fitz had been away for two years. Mrs. Harrington in making overtures of peace to Luke had been prompted by the one consistent motive of her life, self-gratification. She was tired of the obsequious society of persons like the Ingham-Bakers, whom she mentally set down as parasites. There is a weariness of the flesh that comes to rich women uncontrolled. They weary of their own power. Tyranny palls. Mrs. Harrington was longing to be thwarted by some one stronger than herself. The FitzHenrys even in their boyhood had, by their sturdy independence, their simple, seamanlike self-assertion touched some chord in this lone woman's heart which would not vibrate to cringing fingers.

She had sent for Luke because Fitz was away. She wanted to be thwarted. She would have liked to be bullied. And also there was that subtle longing for the voice, the free gesture, the hearty manliness of one whose home is on the sea.

As Luke turned to greet her with the rare smile on his face he was marvellously like Fitz. He was well dressed. There was not the slightest doubt that this was a gentleman. Nay, more, he looked distinguished. And above all, he carried himself like a sailor. So the reconciliation was sudden and therefore complete. A reconciliation to be complete must be sudden. It is too delicate a thing to bear handling.

Luke had come intending to curse. He began to feel like staying to bless. He was quite genial and pleasant, greeting Mrs. Ingham-Baker as an old friend, and thereby distinctly upsetting that lady's mental equilibrium. She had endeavoured to prevent this meeting, because she thought it was not fair to Fitz. She noted the approval with which Mrs. Harrington's keen eyes rested on the young sailor, and endeavoured somewhat obviously to draw Agatha's attention to it by frowns and heavily significant nods, which her dutiful daughter ignored.

Mrs. Harrington glanced impatiently at the clock.

"That stupid Count is late," she said.

"Is the Count de Lloseta coming?" asked Mrs. Ingham-Baker eagerly.

From the strictly impartial standpoint of a mother she felt sure that the Count admired Agatha.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Harrington with a cynical smile.

And Mrs. Ingham-Baker, heedless of the sarcasm, was already engaged in an exhaustive examination of Agatha's dress. She crossed the room and delicately rectified some microscopic disorder of the snake-like hair. With a final glance up and down she crossed her arms at her waist and looked complacently towards the door.

The Count came in, and failed to realize the hope that apparently buoyed Mrs. Ingham-Baker's maternal heart. He did not strike an attitude or cover his dazzled eyes when they rested on Agatha. He merely came forward with his gravest smile and uttered the pleasant fictions appropriate to the occasion. Mrs. Ingham-Baker was marked in her gracious reception of the Spaniard, and the hostess watched her effusions with a queer little smile.

At dinner Mrs. Ingham-Baker was opposite to the Count, who seemed preoccupied and somewhat absent-minded. Her attention was divided between an anticipatory appreciation of Mrs. Harrington's cook and an evident admiration for her own daughter.

"Agatha was just saying," observed the stout lady between the candle shades, "that we had not seen the Count de Lloseta for quite a long time. Only yesterday, was it not, dear?"

Agatha acquiesced with a sublime co-operation only compassed by the feminine operator in human affairs.

"The loss," answered the Count, "is mine. But it is

more than made good by the news that my small absence was noted. I have been abroad."

Mrs. Harrington at the end of the table looked up sharply and a few drops of soup fell from her upraised spoon with a splash.

"In Spain?" she asked.

"In Spain."

CHAPTER IX

CUT FOR PARTNERS

"Beware equally of a sudden friend and a slow enemy."

A WISE man had said of Cipriani de Lloseta that had he not been a Count he would have been a great musician. He had that singular facility with any instrument which is sometimes given to musical persons in recompense for voicelessness. The Count spoke like one who could sing, but his throat was delicate, and so the world lost a great songster. Of most instruments he spoke with a half-concealed contempt. But of the violin he said nothing. He was not a man to turn the conversational overflow upon self-evident facts.

He invariably brought his violin to the great house in Grosvenor Gardens when Mrs. Harrington invited him, in her commanding way, to dine. It amused Mrs. Harrington to accompany his instrument on the piano. Her music was of the accompanying order. It was heartless and correct. Some of us, by the way, have friends of this same order, and, like Mrs. Harrington's music, they are not in themselves either interesting or pleasant.

The piano stood in the inner drawing-room, and thither the Count and Mrs. Harrington repaired when the gentlemen had joined the ladies. In the larger drawing-room Luke was fortunate enough to secure a seat near to Agatha—quite near, and a long way from Mrs. Ingham-Baker, digestively asleep in an armchair.

He did not exactly know how this arrangement was accomplished—it seemed to come. Possibly Agatha knew.

Mrs. Harrington struck a keynote and began playing the prelude of a piece well known to them both.

"Why did you not tell me that you were going to Spain?" she asked, somewhat tersely, under cover of her own chords.

"Had I known that it would interest you——" murmured De Lloseta, tightening his bow. There was a singular gleam in his eye. The gleam that one sees in the eye of a dog which has been thrashed, which tells the wise that one day the dog will turn.

"I am always interested," said the grey lady slowly, "in Spain—and even in Mallorca."

She used the Spanish name of the island with the soft roll in the throat that English people rarely acquire. He was prepared for it, standing with raised bow, looking past her iron-grey head to the music. She glanced back over her shoulder, into his face with the cruel cat-like love of torture that some people possess. Far away in the distant wisdom of Providence it had been decreed

that this woman should have no child less clever than herself to tease into hopelessness.

The Spaniard laid his magic bow to the strings, leaving her to follow. He tucked the violin against his collar with a little caressing motion of his chin, and in a few moments he seemed to forget all else than the voice of the instrument. There are a few musicians who can give unto a violin the power of speech. They can make the instrument tell some story—not a cheery tale, but rather like the story that dogs tell us sometimes—a story which seems to have a sequence of its own, and to be quite intelligible to its teller; but to us it is only comprehensible in part, like a tale that is told dramatically in a tongue unknown.

The Count stood up and played with no fine frenzy, no rolling eyes, no swaying form; for such are the signs of a hopeless effort, hung out by the man who has heard the story and tries in vain to tell it himself.

Even Agatha was outdone, for Luke drifted off into absent-mindedness, and after a little effort she left him to return at his own time. She listened to the music herself, but it did not seem to touch her. For sound ascends, and this was already above Agatha Ingham-Baker's head. The piece over, Mrs. Harrington selected another.

"You did not go across to Mallorca?" she inquired, in a voice that did not reach the other room.

"No," he answered, "I did not go across to Mallorca."

He stepped back a pace to move a chair which was too

near to him, and the movement made it impossible for her to continue the conversation without raising her voice. She countered at once by rising and laying the music aside.

"I am too tired for more," she said. "You must ask Agatha to accompany you. She plays beautifully. I have it from her mother!"

Mrs. Harrington stood for a moment looking into the other room. Luke and Agatha were talking together with some animation.

"I have been very busy lately," she said conversationally. "Perhaps you have failed to notice that I have had this room redecorated?"

He looked round the apartments with a smile, which somehow conveyed a colossal contempt.

"Very charming," he said.

"It was done by a good man and cost a round sum." She paused, looking at him with a mocking glance. "In fact, I am rather in need of money. My balance at the bank is not so large as I could wish."

The Count's dark eyes rested on her face with the small gleam in their depths which has already been noted.

"I am not good at money matters," he said. "But so far as I recollect, you have already exceeded our——"

"Possibly."

"And, unless my memory plays me false, there was a distinct promise that this should not occur again. Perhaps a lady's promise——"

"Possibly."

The Count contented himself with a derisive laugh beneath his breath, and waited for her to speak again. This she did as she moved towards the other room.

"I think five hundred pounds would suffice—at present. Agatha," she continued, raising her voice, "come and play the Count's accompaniment. He finds fault with me to-night."

"No. I only suggested a little *più lento!* You take it too fast."

"Ah! Well, I want to talk to Luke. Come, Agatha."

"I tremble at the thought of my own temerity," said Miss Ingham-Baker, as she seated herself on a music-stool with a great rustle of silks and considerable play of her white arms.

"Are you bold?" inquired the Count, with impenetrable suavity.

"I am—to attempt your accompaniments. I expect to be found fault with."

"It will at all events be a novelty," he answered, setting the music in order; and her quick, sidelong glance told him that she understood the subtle compliment. It almost seemed as if at times the Count Cipriani de Lloseta amused himself by experimenting upon Agatha Ingham-Baker, and also on other young persons of a similar innocent appetite for admiration. It seemed as if at times he tried to gauge the depths of a woman's capacity for the detection of a compliment however subtly concealed. Occasionally the impartial observer might

have thought that the subtlety was present and the compliment lacking.

The Spaniard opened the music-book and indicated the page. Agatha dashed at it with characteristic confidence, and the voice of the violin came singing softly into the melody. It was a better performance than the last. Agatha's playing was much less correct, but as she went on she forgot herself, and she put something into the accompaniment which Mrs. Harrington had left out. It was not time, neither was it a stricter attention to the composer's instructions. It was only a possibility, after all.

In the other room Mrs. Ingham-Baker slumbered still. Mrs. Harrington, unmoved, in her grey silk dress, was talking with her usual incisiveness, and Luke was listening gravely. When the piece was done, Mrs. Harrington said over her shoulder—

"Go on. You get on splendidly together."

And she returned to her conversation with Luke.

The Count looked through his music.

"How devoted she is to her nephews!" said Agatha, tapping the ivory keyboard with a dainty finger.

"Yes."

"And apparently to both alike."

There was a little flicker beneath the Count's lowered eyelids.

"Apparently so," he answered, with assumed hesitation.

Agatha continued playfully tapping the ivory notes

with her middle finger—the others being gracefully curled.

"You speak as if you doubted the impartiality."

"I am happy to say I always doubt a woman's impartiality."

She laughed and drew the stool nearer to the piano. It would have been easier to drift away into the conversational channel of vague generality which he opened up. He waited with some curiosity.

"Do you think there is a preference?" she said, falling into his small trap.

"Ah! There you ask me something that is beyond my poor powers of discrimination. Mrs. Harrington does not wear her feelings on her sleeve. She is difficult."

"Very," admitted Agatha with a little sigh.

"I am naturally interested in the Fitz-Henrys," she went on after a little pause, with baffling frankness. "You see, we were children together."

"So I understand. I too am interested in them—merely because I like them."

"I am afraid," continued Agatha, tentatively turning the pages of the music which he had set before her, speaking as if she was only half thinking of what she was saying—"I am afraid that Mrs. Harrington is the sort of person to do an injustice. She almost told my mother that she intended to leave all her money to one of them."

Again that little flicker of the Count's patient eyelids.

"Indeed!" he said. "To which one?"

Agatha shrugged her shoulders and began playing.

"That is not so much the question. It is the principle—the injustice—that one objects to."

"Of course," murmured de Lloseta, with a little nod. "Of course."

They went on playing, and in the other room Mrs. Harrington talked to Luke. Mrs. Ingham-Baker appeared to slumber, but her friend and hostess suspected her of listening. She therefore raised her voice at intervals, knowing the exquisite torture of unsatisfied curiosity, and Mrs. Ingham-Baker heard the word "Fitz," and the magic syllables "money," more than once, but no connecting phrase to soothe her aching mental palate.

"And is your life a hard one?" Mrs. Harrington was asking. She had been leading up to this question for some time—inviting his confidence, seeking the extent of her own power. A woman is not content with possessing power; she wishes to see the evidence of it in the lives of others.

"No," answered Luke, unconsciously disappointing her; "I cannot say that it is."

He was strictly, sternly on his guard, for his nature was gloomy and morose. There was not the faintest possibility of his ever forgiving this woman.

"And you are getting on in your career?"

"Yes, thank you."

Mrs. Harrington's grey eyes rested on his face searchingly.

"Perhaps I could help you," she said, "with my small influence, or—or by other means."

"Thank you," he said again without anger, serene in his complete independence.

Mrs. Harrington frowned. A dream passed through her mind—a great desire. What if she could crush this man's pride? For his six years' silence had never ceased to gall her. What if she could humble him so completely that he would come asking the help she so carelessly offered?

With a woman's instinct she hit upon the only possible means of attaining this end. She did not pause to argue that a nature such as Luke's would never ask anything for itself—that it is precisely such as he who have no pride when they ask for another, sacrificing even that for that other's sake.

Following her own thoughts, Mrs. Harrington looked pensively into the room where Agatha was sitting. The girl was playing, with a little frown of concentration. The wonderful music close to her ear was busy arousing that small possibility. Agatha did not know that any one was looking at her. The two pink shades of the piano candles cast a becoming light upon her face and form.

Mrs. Harrington's eyes came surreptitiously round. Luke also was looking at Agatha. And a queer little smile hovered across Mrs. Harrington's lips. The dream was assuming more tangible proportions. Mrs. Harrington began to see her way; already her inordinate love of power was at work. She could not admit even

to herself that Luke FitzHenry had escaped her. Women never know when they have had enough.

"How long are you to be in London?" she asked with a sudden kindness.

"Only a fortnight."

"Well, you must often come and see me. I shall have the Ingham-Bakers staying with me a few weeks longer. It is dull for poor Agatha with only two old women in the house. Come to lunch to-morrow, and we can do something in the afternoon."

"Thank you very much," said Luke.

"You will come?"

"I should like nothing better."

And so the music went on—and the game. Some played a losing game from the beginning, and others played without quite knowing the stake. Some held to certain rules, while others made the rules as they went along—as children do—ignorant of the tears that must inevitably follow. But Fate placed all the best cards in Mrs. Harrington's hand.

Luke and the Count Cipriani de Lloseta went out of the house together. They walked side by side for some yards while a watchful hansom followed.

"Can I give you a lift?" said de Lloseta at length. "I am going down to the Peregrinator's."

"Thanks, no. I shall go straight to my rooms. I have not had my clothes off for three nights."

"Ah, you sailors! I am going down to have my half-hour over a book to compose my mind."

"Do you read much?"

De Lloseta called the cab with a jerk of his head. Before stepping into it he looked keenly into his companion's face.

"Yes, a good deal. I read somewhere, lately, that it is never wise to accept favours from a woman; she will always have more than her money's worth. Good night."

And he drove away.

CHAPTER X

THE GAME OPENS

"Ce qu'on dit à l'être à qui on dit tout n'est pas la moitié de ce qu'on lui cache."

AGATHA sent her maid to bed and sat down before her bedroom fire to brush her hair.

Miss Ingham-Baker had, only four years earlier, left a fashionable South Coast boarding-school fully educated for the battle of life. There seem to be two classes of young ladies' boarding-schools. In the one they are educated with a view of faring well in this world, in the other the teaching mostly bears upon matters connected with the next. In the last-mentioned class of establishment the young people get up early and have very little material food to eat. So Mrs. Ingham-Baker wisely sent her daughter to the worldly school. This astute lady knew that girls who get up very early to attend public worship in the dim hours, and have poor meals during the day, do not as a rule make good matches. They have no time to do their hair properly, and are not urged so much thereto as to punctuality at compline, or whatever the service may be. And it is thus that the little habits are acquired, and the little habits make the

woman, therefore the little habits make the match. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

So Agatha was sent to a worldly school, where they promenaded in the King's Road, and were taught at an early age to recognize the glance of admiration when they saw it. They were brought up to desire nice clothes, and to wear the same stylishly. On Sunday they wore bonnets, and promenaded with additional enthusiasm. Their youthful backs were straightened out by some process which the writer, not having been educated at a girls' school, cannot be expected to detail. They were given excellent meals at healthy hours, and the reprehensible habits of the lark were treated with contumely. They were given to understand that it was good to be smart always, and even smarter at church. Religious fervour, if it ran to limpness of dress, or form, or mind, was punishable according to the law. A wholesome spirit of competition was encouraged, not in the taking of many prizes, the attending of many services, or the acquirement of much Euclid, but in dress, smartness, and the accomplishments.

"My girls always marry!" Miss Jones was wont to say with a complacent smile, and mothers advertised it gratuitously.

Agatha had been an apt pupil. She came away from Miss Jones a finished article. Miss Jones had indeed looked in vain for Agatha's name in that right-hand column of the *Morning Post*, where fashionable arrangements are noted, and in the first column of the *Times*,

where further social events have precedence. But that was entirely Agatha's fault. She came, and she saw, but she had not hitherto seen anything worth conquering. So many of her school friends had married on the impulse of the moment for mere sentimental reasons, remaining as awful and harassed warnings in suburban retreats, where rents are moderate and the census on the flow. If there was one thing Miss Jones despised more than love in a cottage, it was that intangible commodity in a suburban villa.

Agatha, in a word, meant to do well for herself, and she was dimly grateful to her mother for having foreseen this situation and provided for it by a suitable education.

She was probably thinking over the matter while she brushed her hair, for she was deeply absorbed.

There was a knock at the door—a timid, deprecatory knock.

"Oh, come in!" cried Agatha.

The door opened and disclosed Mrs. Ingham-Baker, stout and cringing, in a ludicrous purple dressing-gown.

"May I come and warm myself at your fire, dear?" she inquired humbly; "my own is so low."

"That," said Agatha, "is because you are afraid of the servants."

Mrs. Ingham-Baker closed the door and came towards the fire with surreptitious steps. It would not be truthful to say that she came on tiptoe, her build not warranting that mode of progression. Agatha watched her without surprise. Mrs. Ingham-Baker always moved

like that in her dressing-gown. Like many ladies, she put on stealth with that garment.

"How beautifully the Count plays!" said the mother.

"Beautifully!" answered Agatha.

And neither was thinking of Cipriani de Lloseta.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker gave a little sigh, and contemplated her wool-work bedroom slippers with an affection which their appearance certainly did not warrant. There was a suggestion of bygone defeats in sigh and attitude—defeats borne with the resignation that followeth on habit.

"I don't believe," she said, "that he will ever marry again."

The girl tossed her pretty head.

"I shouldn't think any one would have him!"

She was not of the campaigners who admit defeat. Mrs. Ingham-Baker sighed again, and put out the other slipper.

"He must be very rich!—a palace in Barcelona—a *palace!*"

"Other people have castles in Spain," replied Agatha, without any of that filial respect which our grandmothers were pleased to affect. There was nothing old-fashioned or effete about Agatha—she was, on the contrary, essentially modern.

The elder lady did not catch the allusion, and dived deep into thought. She supposed that Agatha had met and danced with other rich Spaniards, and could have any one of them by the mere raising of her little finger.

Her attitude towards her daughter was that of an old campaigner who, having done well in a bygone time, has the good sense to recognize the deeper science of a modern warfare, being quite content with a small command in the rear.

To carry out the simile, she now gathered from this conversational reconnaissance that the younger and abler general at the front was about to alter the object of attack. She had, in fact, come in not to warm, but to inform herself.

"Mrs. Harrington seemed to take to Luke," said Agatha, behind her hair.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Ingham-Baker, proceeding carefully, for she was well in hand—"wonderfully so! Poor Fitz seems to stand a very good chance of being cut out."

"Fitz will have to look after himself," opined the young lady. "Did she say anything to you after I came to bed? I came away on purpose."

Mrs. Ingham-Baker glanced towards the door, and drew her dressing-gown more closely round her.

"*Well*," she began volubly, "of course I said what a nice fellow Luke was, so manly and simple, and all that. And she quite agreed with me. I said that perhaps he would get on after all and not bring disgrace upon all her kindness."

"What do you mean by *that?*" inquired Agatha.

"I don't know, my dear, but I said it. And she said she hoped so. Then I asked her if she knew what his

wages or salary, or whatever they are called, amounted to, and what his prospects are. She said she knew nothing about his salary, but that of course his prospects were quite a different matter. I pretended I did not know what she meant. So she gave a little sigh and said that one could not expect to live for ever. I said that I was sure I wished some people could, and she smiled in a funny way."

"You do not seem to have done it very well," the younger and more scientific campaigner observed coldly.

"Oh, but it was all right, Agatha dear. I understand her so well. And I said I was sure that Luke would deserve anything he got; that of course it was different for Fitz, because his life is all set out straight before him. And she said I was quite right."

The report was finished, and Agatha sat for some moments with the brush on her lap looking into the fire with the deep thoughtfulness of a cool tactician.

"I am *sure* he was struck with you," said the mother, fervently.

After all she was only fit for a very small command very far in the rear. She never saw the singular light in Agatha's eyes.

"Do you think so?" said the girl, half dreamily.

"I am sure of it."

Agatha began brushing her hair again.

"What makes you think so?" she inquired through the snaky canopy.

"He never took his eyes off you when you were playing the Count's accompaniments."

The girl suddenly rose and went to the dressing table. The candles there were lighted, one on each side of the mirror. Agatha saw that her mother was still admiring her bedroom slippers. Then she looked at the reflection of her own face with the smooth hair hanging straight down over either shoulder. She gazed long and curiously as if seeking something in the pleasant reflection.

"Did she say anything more about Fitz?" she asked suddenly, with an obvious change of the subject which Mrs. Ingham-Baker did not attempt to understand. She was not a subtle woman.

"Nothing."

Agatha came back and sat down.

"And you are quite sure she said exactly what you have told me, about not expecting to live for ever."

"Quite."

Then followed a long silence. A belated cab rattled past beneath the windows. There was apparently a cowl on the chimney connected with Agatha's room, for at intervals a faint groaning sound came, apparently, from the fireplace.

Agatha leant forward with her chin on her two hands, her elbows on her knees. Her hair hung almost to the ground. She was looking into the coals with thoughtful eyes. The elder tactician waited in respectful silence.

"Suppose——" said the girl suddenly, and stopped.

"Yes, my darling."

"Suppose we accept the Danefords' invitation?"

"To go to Malta."

"Yes, to go to Malta?"

Mrs. Ingham-Baker fell into a puzzled, harassed reverie. This modern warfare was so complicated. The younger, keener tactician did not seem to demand an answer to her supposition. She proceeded to follow out the train of her own thoughts in as complete an absorption as if she had been alone in the room.

"The voyage," she said, "would be a pleasant change if we selected a good boat."

Mrs. Ingham-Baker reflected for a moment.

"We might go in the *Croonah* with Luke," she then observed timidly.

"Ye—es."

And after a little while Mrs. Ingham-Baker rose and bade her daughter good night.

Agatha remained before the fire in the low chair with her face resting on her two hands, and who can tell all that she was thinking? For the thoughts of youth are very quick. They are different from the thoughts of maturity, inasmuch as they rise higher into happiness and descend deeper into misery. Agatha Ingham-Baker knew that she had her own life to shape, with only such blundering, well-meant assistance as her mother could give her. She had found out that the world cannot pause to help the stricken, or to give a hand to the fallen, but that it always has leisure to cringe and make way for the successful.

Other girls had been successful. Why should not she? And if—and if——

The next morning at breakfast Mrs. Ingham-Baker took an opportunity of asking Mrs. Harrington if she knew Malta.

"Malta," answered the grey lady, "is a sort of Nursery India. I have known girls marry at Malta, but I have known more who were obliged to go to India."

"That," answered Mrs. Ingham-Baker, "is exactly what I am afraid of."

"Having to go on to India?" inquired Mrs. Harrington, looking over her letters.

"No. I am afraid that Malta is not quite the place one would like to take one's daughter to."

"That depends, I should imagine, upon the views one may have respecting one's daughter," answered the lady of the house carelessly.

At this moment Agatha came in looking fresh and smart in a tweed dress. She rather affected tweed dresses, having been given a beautiful figure. There was something about her that made people turn in the streets to look at her again. For years she had noted this with much satisfaction. But she was beginning to get a little tired of the homage of the pavement. Those who turned to glance a second time never came back to offer her a heart and a fortune. She was perhaps beginning faintly to suspect that which many of us know —namely, that she who has the admiration of many rarely

has the love of one ; and if by chance she gets this, she never knows its value and rarely keeps it.

"I was just asking Mrs. Harrington about Malta, dear," exclaimed Mrs. Ingham-Baker. "It is a nice place, is it not, Marian ?"

"I believe it is."

"And somehow I quite want to go there. I can't think why," said Mrs. Ingham-Baker, volubly. "It would be so nice to get a little sunshine after these grey skies, would it not, dear ?"

Agatha gave a little shiver as she sat down.

"It would be very nice to feel really warm," she said. "But there is the horrid sea voyage."

"I dare say you would enjoy that very much after the first two days," put in Mrs. Harrington.

"Especially if we select a nice large boat—one of those with two funnels !" put in Mrs. Ingham-Baker. "Now I wonder what boat we could go by ?"

"Luke's," suggested Mrs. Harrington with cynical curtness. There was a subtle suggestion of finality in her tone, a tiniest note of weariness which almost said—

"Now we have reached our goal."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Ingham-Baker, doubtfully, "that it is really a fine vessel ?"

"So I am told."

"I really expect," put in Agatha, carelessly, "that one steamer is as good as another."

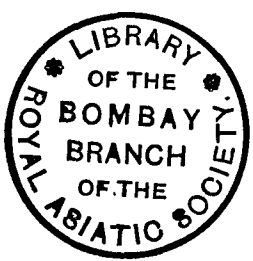
Mrs. Harrington turned on her like suave lightning.

"But one boat is not so well officered as another, my dear!" she said.

Agatha—not to be brow-beaten, keen as the older fencer—looked Mrs. Harrington straight in the face.

"You mean Luke," she said. "Of course I dare say he is a good officer. But one always feels doubtful about trusting one's friends—does one not?"

"One does," answered Mrs. Harrington, turning to her letters.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CHAPTER XI

SHIPS UPON THE SEA

"All such things touch secret strings
For heavy hearts to bear."

"AND you don't seem to care."

Agatha smiled a little inward smile of triumph.

"Don't I?" she answered, with a sidelong glance beneath her lashes.

Luke stared straight in front of him with set lips. He looked a dangerous man to trifle with, and what woman can keep her hands out of such danger as this?

They were walking backwards and forwards on the broad promenade deck of the *Croonah*, and the *Croonah* was gliding through the grey waters of the Atlantic. To their left lay the coast of Portugal smiling in the sunshine. To their right the orb of day himself, lowering cloudless to the horizon. Ahead, bleak and lonely, lay the dread Burlings. The maligned Bay of Biscay lay behind, and already a large number of the passengers had plucked up spirit to leave the cabin stairs, crawling on deck to lie supine in long chairs and talk hopefully of calmer days to come.

Agatha had proved herself to be a good sailor. She walked beside Luke FitzHenry with her usual dainty firmness of step and confidence of carriage. Luke, himself—in uniform—looked sternly in earnest.

They had been talking of Gibraltar, where the *Croonah* was to touch the next morning, and Luke had just told Agatha that he could not go ashore with her and Mrs. Ingham-Baker.

"Don't I?" the girl reiterated with a little sigh.

"Well, it does not sound like it."

"The truth is," said Agatha, "that I have an inward conviction that it would only be more trouble than it is worth."

"What would be more trouble than it is worth?"

"Going ashore."

"Then you will not go?" he asked eagerly.

"I think not," she answered, with demure downcast eyes.

And Luke FitzHenry was the happiest man on board the *Croonah*. There was no mistaking her meaning. Luke, who knew himself to be a pessimist—a man who persistently looked for ill-fortune—felt that her meaning could not well be other than that she preferred remaining on board because he could not go ashore.

The dinner bell rang out over the quiet decks, and, with a familiar little nod, Agatha turned away from her companion.

The next morning saw the *Croonah* speeding past Trafalgar's heights. There was a whistling breeze from

the West; and over the mountains of Tarifa and the far gloomy fastness of Ceuta hung clouds and squalls. The sea, lashed to white flecks, raced through the straits, and every now and then a sharp shower darkened the face of the waters. There was something forbidding and mysterious in the scene, something dark and foreboding over the coast-line of Africa. All eyes were fixed on the Rock, now slowly appearing from behind the hills that hide Algeciras.

Luke was on duty on the bridge, motionless at his post. It was a simple matter to these mariners to make for the anchorage of Gibraltar, and Luke was thinking of Agatha. He was recalling a thousand little incidents which came back with a sudden warm thrill into his heart, the chilled, stern heart of a disappointed man. He was recollecting words that she had said, silences which she had kept, glances which she had given him. And all told him the same thing. All went to the core of his passionate, self-consuming heart.

The bay now lay before him, dotted here and there by close-reefed sails. A few steamers lay at anchor, and, beyond the old Mole, black coal hulks peacefully stripped of rigging. Suddenly Luke lifted the lid of the small box affixed to the rail in front of him and sought his glasses. For some seconds he looked through the binoculars fixedly in the direction of the Mole. Then he moved towards the captain.

"That is the *Kittiwake*," he said.

"Thought it looked like her!" replied the captain, intent on his own affairs.

Luke went back to his post. The *Kittiwake!* And he was not glad. It was that that puzzled him. He was not glad. He was going to see Fitz after many years, and twins are different from other brothers. They usually see more of each other all through life. They are necessary to each other. Fitz and Luke had always corresponded as regularly as their roaming lives allowed. But for three years they had never met.

Luke stood with beating heart, his eyes fixed on the trim rakish-looking little gunboat lying at anchor immediately off the Mole. He was suddenly breathless. His light oil-skins oppressed him. His lips were clay. There was a vague feeling within him that he had only begun to live within the last two weeks—all before that had been merely existence. And now he was living too quickly, without time to define his feelings. But the sensations were real enough. It does not take long to acquire a feeling.

After all he was not glad. His attention was required for a few moments to carry out an order, and he returned to his thought. He did not, however, think it out. He only knew that if Agatha had not been on board the *Croonah* he would have been breathlessly impatient to see his brother. Therefore he did not want Agatha and Fitz to meet. And yet Fitz was quite different from other men. There was no harm in Fitz, and surely he could be trusted to see Agatha for a few hours without falling in love with her, without making Agatha love him.

Yet—Fitz had always succeeded where he, Luke, had

failed. Fitz had always the good things of life. It was all luck. It had been luck from the very beginning. Another order required the second officer's full mind and attention. There were a thousand matters to be attended to, for the *Croonah* was enormous, unwieldy.

In the execution of his duties Luke began presently to forget himself. He did not attempt to define his thoughts. He did not even reflect that he knew so little of his brother that this meeting could not possibly cause him this sudden uneasiness, this foreboding care, from *that* side of the question. He did not fear for Fitz to meet Agatha, he really dreaded Agatha seeing Fitz.

The *Croonah* moved into her anchorage with that gentle strength which in a large steamer seems to indicate that she is thinking about it and doing it all herself. For in these days there is no shouting, no call of boatswain's whistle; and the ordinary observer hardly notices the quiet *deus ex machinâ*, the man on the bridge.

Hardly had the anchor splashed home with a rattle of cable that vibrated through the ship, when a small white boat shot out from behind the smart *Kittiwake*, impelled by the short and regular beat of ten oars. There was a man seated in the stern enveloped in a large black boat cloak—for Gibraltar harbour is choppy when the westerly breezes blow—a man who looked the *Croonah* up and down with a curious searching eye. The boat shot alongside the vast steamer—the bowman neatly catching a rope that was thrown to him—and the officer clambered up the swaying gangway.

He pushed his way gently through the passengers, the cloak flying partially open as he did so and displaying Her Majesty's uniform. He treated all these people with that patient tolerance which belongs to the mariner when dealing with landsmen. They were so many sheep penned up in a conveyance. Well-dressed sheep, he admitted tacitly by the withdrawal of his dripping cloak from their contact, but he treated them in the bulk, failing to notice one more than another. He utterly failed to observe Agatha Ingham-Baker, dainty and fresh in blue serge and a pert sailor hat. She knew him at once, and his want of observation was set down in her mind against him. She did not want him to recognize her. Not at all. She merely wanted him to look at her, and then to look again—to throw a passing crumb of admiration to her greedy vanity, which lived on such daily food.

Fitz, intent on his errand, pushed his way towards the steps leading up through the awning to the bridge. He seemed to know by some sailor instinct where to find it. He paused at the foot of the iron steps to give an order to the man who followed at his heel, and the attitude was Luke's. The onlookers saw at a glance who this must be. The resemblance was startling. This was merely Luke FitzHenry over again, somewhat fairer, a little taller, but the same man.

The captain gave a sudden bluff laugh when Fitz emerged on the little spidery bridge far above the deck.

"No doubt who you are, sir," he said, holding out his hand.

Then he stepped aside, and the two brothers met. They said nothing, merely shaking hands, and Luke's eyes involuntarily went to the smart, simple uniform half hidden by the cloak. Fitz saw the glance and drew his cloak hastily round him. It was unfortunate.

And this was their meeting after three years.

"By George!" exclaimed Fitz, after a momentary pause, "she *is* a fine ship!"

Luke rested his hands on the white painted rail—almost a caress to the great steamer—and followed the direction of his brother's glance.

"Yes," he admitted slowly, "yes, she is a good boat."

And then his deep eyes wandered involuntarily towards the tiny *Kittiwake*—smart, man-of-war-like at her anchorage—and a sudden sharp sigh broke from his lips. He had not got over it yet. He never would.

"So you have got away," he went on, "from Mahon at last?"

"Yes," answered Fitz.

"I should think you have had enough of Minorca to last you the rest of your life," said Luke, looking abruptly down at the quarrelling boatmen and the tangle of tossing craft beneath them.

"It is not such a bad place as all that," replied Fitz. "I—I rather like it."

There was a little pause, and quite suddenly Luke said—

"The Ingham-Bakers are on board."

It would almost seem that these twin minds followed each other into the same train of thought. Fitz frowned with an air of reflectiveness.

"The Ingham-Bakers," he said. "Who are they?"

Luke gave a little laugh which almost expressed a sudden relief.

"Don't you remember!" he said. "She is a friend of Mrs. Harrington's, and—and there is Agatha, her daughter."

"I remember—stout. Not the daughter, the old woman, I mean. Oh—yes. Where are they going?"

"To Malta."

It was perfectly obvious, even to Luke, that the Ingham-Bakers' immediate or projective destination was a matter of the utmost indifference to Fitz, who was more interested in the *Croonah* than in her passengers.

They were both conscious of an indefinite feeling of disappointment. This meeting after years of absence was not as it should be. Something seemed to stand between them—a shadow, a myth, a tiny distinction. Luke, with characteristic pessimism, saw it first—felt its chill, intangible presence before his less subtle-minded brother. Then Fitz saw it, and, as was his habit, he went at it unhesitatingly.

"Gad!" he exclaimed, "I am glad to see you, old chap. Long time, isn't it, since we saw each other? You must come back with me, and have lunch or

something. The men will be awfully glad to make your acquaintance. You can look over the ship, though she is not much to look at, you know! Not up to this. She is a fine ship, Luke! What can she steam?"

"She can do her twenty," answered the second officer of the *Croonah*, indifferently.

"Yes, she looks it. Well, can you get away now?"

Luke shook his head.

"No," he answered almost ungraciously, "I can't leave the ship."

"What! Not to come and look over the *Kittiwake?*" Fitz's face fell visibly. He did not seem to be able to realize that any one should be equal to relinquishing without a murmur the opportunity of looking over the *Kittiwake.*

"No, I am afraid not. We have our discipline too, you know. Besides, we are rather like railway guards. We must keep up to time. We shall be under way by two o'clock."

Fitz pressed the point no further. He had been brought up to discipline since childhood—moreover, he was rather clever in a simple way, and he had found out that it would be no pleasure but a pain to Luke to board a ship flying the white ensign.

"Can I stay on board to lunch with you?" he asked easily. "Goodness only knows when we shall run against each other again. It was the merest chance. We only got in last night. I was just going ashore to report when we saw the old *Croonah* come pounding in.

That "—he paused and drew his cloak closer—"is why I am in my war-paint! We are going straight home."

"Stay by all means," said Luke.

Fitz nodded.

"I suppose," he added as an afterthought, "that I ought to pay my respects to Mrs. Ingham-Baker?"

Luke's face cleared suddenly. Fitz had evidently forgotten about Agatha.

"I will ask them to lunch with us in my cabin," he said.

And presently they left the bridge.

In due course Fitz was presented to the Ingham-Bakers, and Agatha was very gracious. Fitz looked at her a good deal. Simply because she made him. She directed all her conversation and eke her bright eyes in his direction. He listened, and when necessary he laughed a jolly resounding laugh. How could she tell that he was drawing comparisons all the while? It is the simple-minded men who puzzle women most. Whenever Luke's face clouded she swept away the gathering gloom with some small familiar attention—some reference to him in her conversation with Fitz which somehow brought him nearer and set Fitz further off.

Suddenly, on hearing that Fitz hoped to be in England within a week, Mrs. Ingham-Baker fell heavily into the conversation.

"I am afraid," she said, "that you will find our dear Mrs. Harrington more difficult to get on with than ever. In fact—he, he!—I almost feel inclined to advise you

not to try. But I suppose you will not be much in London?"

Fitz looked at her with clear, keen blue eyes.

"I expect to be there some time," he answered. "I hope to stay with Mrs. Harrington."

Mrs. Ingham-Baker glanced at Agatha, and returned somewhat hastily to her galantine of veal.

Agatha was drumming on the table with her fingers.

CHAPTER XII

A SHUFFLE

"To love is good, no doubt, but you love best
A calm safe life, with wealth and ease and rest."

THE *Croonah* ran round Europa Point into fine weather, and the wise old captain—who felt the pulse of the saloon with unerring touch—deemed it expedient to pin upon the board the notice of a ball to be given on the following night. There was considerable worldly knowledge in this proceeding. The passengers still had the air of Europe in their lungs, the energy of Europe in their limbs. Nothing pulls a ship full of people together so effectually as a ball. Nothing gives such absorbing employment to the female mind which would otherwise get into hopeless mischief. Besides they had been at sea five days, and the captain knew that more than one ingenuous maiden, sitting in thoughtful idleness about the decks, was lost in vague forebodings as to the creases in her dresses ruthlessly packed away in the hold.

The passengers were, in fact, finding their sea-legs;

which, from the captain's point of view, meant that the inner men and the outer women would now require and receive a daily increasing attention. So he said a word to the head cook, and to the fourth officer he muttered—

"Let the women have their trunks!"

Agatha read the notice displayed halfway down the saloon stairs with considerable satisfaction. There were, indeed, one or two closed cabin doors which caused her some uneasiness, but she hoped for the best; and certainly she had as yet set her calculating eyes on nothing in the shape of ingenuous maidenhood or ingenious toilet to cause her the least uneasiness. This ball would settle the matter once for all; and she intended to be the belle of it. Some chit of a bread-and-butter miss might indeed emerge from one of the closed cabins, but Agatha reflected that a person who had not got over her sea-sickness on the fifth day could not assuredly be a dangerous rival on the sixth. She could not be a girl of any backbone. This was an expression of which Agatha frequently made use. It is readily comprehensible if for one anatomical symbol one substitutes another—namely, cheek.

It has been decreed that a besetting vice shall, like a cheap German revolver, ultimately turn in the hand. If, in a word, a man or woman have a besetting sin which causes endless trouble to those around, leave that man or woman alone. The sin will surely turn upon them.

Agatha Ingham-Baker was the victim to this counter-balancing law on the evening with which we have to deal. Her vanity fell back upon her own head—not with a crash, but slowly—bit by bit. She had been to a thousand balls since Miss Jones had sent her, from the door of the Brighton seminary, a perfect social article, and, like a conscientious actor, she had always been seen at her best. The love of admiration, the insatiable greed for compliment, covert or open or dumb, had never allowed her to lay aside even for one evening those thousand little steely arms with which she waged her warfare against men. Miss Jones had faithfully inculcated the primary law that dress is better than salvation. Mrs. Ingham-Baker had clumsily thrown worldly wisdom in large coarse chunks at her feet, and Agatha had been launched into society to find her own level. When a girl has to find her own level she usually finds a low one. Neither Miss Jones nor Mrs. Ingham-Baker seemed to have thought of this. The former only thought perhaps of the brilliant reputation of her school. The latter—well, it is probable that she never thought at all. Some middle-aged ladies never do.

Agatha had therefore learnt to play to the gallery, as we say in these days of amateur theatricals. She had found out for herself those little feminine tricks of dress and manner which make men ask each other who that girl is. And if matrons were cold and maidens distant, she had at hand the ready argument of the society girl—jealousy.

She had not been very scrupulous in her methods of attracting attention; people at a low level are not usually overburthened with scruples.

Once or twice even Mrs. Ingham-Baker offered a slight and hesitating objection.

"Isn't that dress a little—well—couldn't it be taken up here, on the shoulder?"

To which Agatha replied—

"Nonsense, mother! *You* can't talk. Look at that portrait of you when you were nineteen. I blush for you."

And Mrs. Ingham-Baker had perforce to blush for herself.

On another occasion it was a question of a sleeve.

"Aren't they wearing them—well—fuller, you know, dear, now?"

"Yes," replied Agatha, sharply, "the girls with red arms."

And Mrs. Ingham-Baker grovelled. She descended to the degradation of one of the world's worst creations—a flattering mother.

Now the strange thing was that Agatha—all intent as she was on dazzling the ship and eclipsing all rivals—was very careful to choose a dress for this ball that would not appeal to the gallery. She chose a simple black, which she had been in the habit of wearing on quiet evenings at Grosvenor Gardens. For the instinct of a woman's vanity is almost infallible. It makes her that which one man wants her to be or thinks she is.

Agatha was dressing for Luke, and it was vanity—but the best vanity—that which seeks for love and not admiration, that made her discard some of her more startling dresses for the simple black. The same instinct almost made her hate those same dresses. She was afraid of seeing something in Luke's eyes which she had seen in the eyes of other upright men—but she had only despised those other men for it. It had not touched her. After all, it was only the same small possibility in Agatha Ingham-Baker which had slipped from her fingers into the notes of the piano while the Count de Lloseta's violin sang in her ears.

When Agatha appeared at the door of her mother's cabin, that good lady's face fell.

"What, dear? Your old black!"

"Yes, dear, my old black," replied the dutiful daughter. She was arranging a small bouquet of violets in the front of her dress—a bouquet she had found in her cabin when she went to dress. Luke had, no doubt, sent ashore for them at Gibraltar—and there was something of the unknown, the vaguely possible, in his manner of placing them on her tiny dressing-table, without a word of explanation, which appealed to her jaded imagination.

There was some suggestion of recklessness about Agatha, which her mother almost detected—something which had never been suggested in the subtler element of London drawing-room. The girl spoke in a short, sharp way which was new to the much-snubbed

rear-commander. Agatha still had this when Luke asked her for a dance.

"Yes," she answered curtly, handing him the card and avoiding his eyes.

He stepped back to take advantage of the light of a swinging hurricane lamp, and leant against the awning which had been closed in all round.

"How many may I have?" he asked

She continued to look anywhere except in his direction. Then quite suddenly she gave a little laugh.

"All."

"What?" he added, with a catch in his breath.

"You may have them all."

There was a pause; then Agatha turned with a half-mocking smile, and looked at him. For the first time in her life she was really frightened. She had never seen passion in a man's face before. It was the one thing she had never encountered in the daily round of social effort in London. Not an evil passion, but the strong passion of love, which is as rare in human beings as is genius. He was standing in a conventional attitude, holding her programme—and that which took the girl's breath away lay in his eyes alone.

She could not meet his look, for she felt suddenly quite puny and small and powerless. She realized in that flash of thought that there was a whole side of life of which she had never suspected the existence. After all, she was learning the lesson that millions of women have to learn before they quite realize what life is.

She smiled nervously, and looked hard at the little card in his strong, still hands—wondering what she had done. She saw him write his name opposite five or six dances. Then he handed her the card, and left her with a grave bow—left her without a word of explanation, to take his silence and explain it if she could. That sense of the unknown in him, which appealed so strongly to her, seemed to rise and envelop her in a maze of thought and imagination which was bewildering in its intensity—thrilling with a new life.

When he came back later to claim his first dance, he was quietly polite, and nothing else. They danced until the music stopped, and Agatha knew that she had met her match in this as in other matters.

The dancers trooped out to the dimly-lighted deck, while the quartermaster raised the awning to allow the fresh air to circulate. Luke and Agatha went with the rest, her hand resting unsteadily on his sleeve. She had never felt unsteady like this before. She was conscious, probably for the first time in her life, of a strange, creeping fear. She was distinctly afraid of the first words that her partner would say when they were alone. Spread out over the broad deck the many passengers seemed but a few. It was almost solitude—and Agatha was afraid of solitude with Luke. Yet she had selected a dress which she knew would appeal to him. She had dressed for him—which means something from a woman's point of view. She had welcomed this ball with a certain reckless throb of excitement, not for its

own sake, but for Luke's. The unerring instinct of her vanity had not played her false. She had succeeded, and now she was afraid of her success. There is a subtle fear in all success, and an indefinite responsibility.

Luke knew the ship. He led the way to a deserted corner of the deck, with a deliberation which set Agatha's heart beating.

"What did you mean when you said I could have all the dances?" asked Luke, slowly. His eyes gleamed deeply as he looked down at her. And Agatha had no answer ready.

She stood before him with downcast eyes—like a chidden child who has been meddling with danger.

And suddenly his arms were round her. She gave a little gasp, but made no attempt to escape from him. This was all so different, so new to her. There was something in the strong salt air blowing over them which seemed to purify the world and raise them above the sordid cares thereof. There was something simple and strong and primitive in this man—at home on his own element, all filled with the strength of the ocean—mastering her, claiming her as if by force.

"What did you mean?" he asked again.

And his kiss awakened her from a new dream. She pushed him away, and turning stood beside him with her two hands resting on the rail, her back turned towards him.

"Oh, Luke," she whispered at length, "I can't be poor—I *can't*—I can't. You do not know what it is.

It has always been such a struggle—there is no rest in it."

It is said that women can raise men above the world. How often do they bring them down to it when they are raising themselves!

And Luke's love was large enough to accept her as she was.

"And if I were not poor?" he asked, without any of the sullen pride that was his.

She answered nothing, and he read her silence aright.

"I will get rich," he said, "somehow. I do not care how. I will, I will—Agatha!"

She did not dare to meet his eyes.

"Come," she said. "Come—let us go back."

They danced together again, but Agatha refused to sit anywhere but beneath the awning. While they were dancing they did not speak. He never took his eyes off her, and she never looked at him.

Then, just as he was, with a pilot jacket exchanged for his dress coat, Luke had to go on duty on the bridge. While he stood there, far above the lighted decks, alone at his post in the dark, keen and watchful, still as a statue, the sound of the dance music rose up and enveloped him like the echo of a happy dream.

Presently the music ceased, and the weary dancers went below, leaving Luke FitzHenry to his own thoughts.

All the world seemed to be asleep except these two men—one motionless on the bridge, the other alert in the dimly lighted wheelhouse. The *Croonah* herself seemed

to slumber with the regular beating of a great restless heart far down in her iron being.

The dawn was now creeping up into the eastern sky, touching the face of the waters with a soft, pearly light. A few straight streaks of cloud became faintly outlined. The moon looked yellow and deathlike.

Luke stood watching the rise of a new day, and with it there seemed to be rising within him a new life.

Beneath his feet, in her dainty cabin, Agatha Ingham-Baker saw that dawn also. She was standing with her arms folded on the upper berth breast high. She had been standing there an hour. She was alone in the cabin, for Luke had secured separate rooms for the two ladies.

Agatha had not moved since she came down from the ball. She did not seem to be thinking of going to bed. The large square port-hole was open, and the cool breeze fluttered the lace of her dress, stirring the dead violets at her breast.

Her finely cut features were set with a look of strong determination. "I can't—I can't be poor," she was repeating to herself with a mechanical monotony.

CHAPTER XIII

A CHOICE

"'Tis better far to love and be poor,
Than be rich with an empty heart."

MRS. HARRINGTON was sitting in the great drawing-room in Grosvenor Gardens, alone. The butler was fuming and cleaning plate in his pantry. The maid was weeping in the workroom. Mrs. Harrington had had a busy afternoon.

"'Tis always thus when she's alone in the house," the cook had said, with a grandiosity of style borrowed from the *Family Herald*. It is easy for the cook to be grandiose when the butler and the lady's maid are in trouble. Thus philosophy walketh in at the back door.

Mrs. Harrington's sharp grey face twitched at times with a certain restlessness which was hers when she had no one at hand to bully. She could not concentrate her attention on the newspaper she held in her hands, and at intervals her eyes wandered over the room in search of something to find fault with. She made the mistake common to persons under such circumstances—she forgot to look in the mirror. Mrs. Harrington was tired of

herself. She wished some one would call. At the same time she felt a cordial dislike to all her friends.

It was a hopelessly grey afternoon early in December, and every one was out of London. Mrs. Harrington had a certain circle of friends—middle-aged or elderly women, rich like herself, lonely like herself—whom she despised. They all rather disliked each other, these women, but they visited nevertheless. They dined together seriously; keeping in mind the cook, and watchful over the wine. But the majority of these ladies had gone away for the winter. The Riviera was created for such.

Mrs. Harrington, however, never went abroad in the winter. She said that she had travelled too much when she was younger—in the lifetime of her husband—to care about it now. The Honourable George Henry Harrington had, in fact, lived abroad for financial reasons, and the name was not of sweet savour in the nostrils of hotel keepers. The married life referred to occasionally in cold tones by the Honourable Mrs. Harrington had been of that order which is curtly called "cat and dog," and likewise "hand to mouth."

Therefore Mrs. Harrington avoided the Continent. She could easily, of her affluence, have paid certain large debts which she knew to be outstanding, but she held a theory that dead men owe nothing. And with this theory she lubricated an easy-going conscience.

The mistress of the large house in Grosvenor Gardens

was wondering discontentedly what she was going to do with herself until tea-time, when she heard the sound of a bell ringing far down in the basement. Despite the grand drawing-room, despite the rich rustle of her grey silk dress, this great lady peeped from behind the curtain, and saw a hansom cab.

A few minutes later the door was thrown open by the angry butler.

"Miss Challoner—Captain Bontnor."

Eve came in, and at her heels Captain Bontnor, who sheered off as it were from the butler, and gave him a wide berth.

Mrs. Harrington could be gracious when she liked. She liked now, and she would have kissed her visitor had that young lady shown any desire for such an honour. But there was a faint reflex of Spanish ceremony in Eve Challoner, of which she was probably unaware. A few years ago it would not have been noticeable, but to-day we are hail-fellow-well-met even with ladies—which is a mistake, on the part of the ladies.

"So you received my letter, my dear," said Mrs. Harrington.

"Yes," replied Eve. "This is my uncle—Captain Bontnor."

Mrs. Harrington had the bad taste to raise her eyebrows infinitesimally, and Captain Bontnor saw it.

"How do you do?" said Mrs. Harrington, with a stiff bow.

"I am quite well, thank you, marm," replied the

sailor, with more *aplomb* than Eve had yet seen him display.

Without waiting to hear this satisfactory intelligence, Mrs. Harrington turned to Eve again. She evidently intended to ignore Captain Bontnor systematically and completely.

"You know," she said, "I am related to your father——"

"By marriage," put in Captain Bontnor, with simple bluntness. He was brushing his hat with a large pocket-handkerchief.

"And I have pleasant recollections of his kindness in past years. I stayed with him at the Casa d'Erraha more than once. I was staying there when—well, some years ago. I think you had better come and live with me until your poor father's affairs have been put in order."

Captain Bontnor raised his head and ceased his operations on the dusty hat. His keen old eyes, full of opposition, were fixed on Eve's face. He was quite ready to be rude again, but women know how to avoid these shallow places better than men, with a policy which is not always expedient perhaps.

"Thank you," replied Eve. "Thank you very much, but my uncle has kindly offered me a home."

Mrs. Harrington's grey face suggested a scorn which she apparently did not think it worth while to conceal from a person who wiped the inside of his hat with his pocket-handkerchief in a lady's presence.

"But," she said coldly, "I should think that your

uncle cannot fail to see the superior advantages of the offer I am now making you, from a social point of view, if from no other."

"I do see them advantages, marm," said the captain, bluntly. He looked at Eve with something dog-like peering from beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

"Of course," continued Mrs. Harrington, ignoring the confession, "you have been brought up as a lady, and are accustomed to refinement, and in some degree to luxury."

"You needn't make it any plainer, marm," blurted out Captain Bontnor. "I don't need you to tell me that my niece is above me. I don't set up for bein' anything, nor what I am. There's not much of the gentleman about me. But——"

He paused, and half turned towards Eve.

"But, 'cording to my lights, I'm seeking to do my duty towards the orphan child of my sister Amelia Ann."

"Not overlooking the fact, I suppose, that the orphan child of your sister Amelia Ann has a very fair income of her own."

Captain Bontnor smiled blandly, and smoothed his hat with his sleeve.

"Not overlooking that fact, marm," he said, "if you choose to take it so."

Mrs. Harrington turned to Eve again with a faint reflex of her overbearing manner towards the Ingham-Bakers and other persons who found it expedient to submit.

'You will see at a glance," she said, "that it is impossible for you to live with Captain Bontnor."

"I have already accepted his kind offer," returned the girl. "Thank you, nevertheless."

"But," said Mrs. Harrington, "that was before you knew that I was ready to make a home for you."

Captain Bontnor had turned away. He blew his nose so loudly that Mrs. Harrington frowned. There was something trumpet-like and defiant in the sound. Opposition had ever a strange effect on this spoilt woman. She liked it, as serving to enhance the value of the wish which she rarely failed to gratify in the end.

"You must remember your position," she continued. "These are very democratic days, when silly people think that all men are equal. A lady is nevertheless still a lady, and a gentleman a gentleman, though one does not often meet them. I wish you to come and live with me."

Eve's dark eyes flashed suddenly. She glanced at her uncle, and said nothing.

"A girl with money is a ready dupe to designing persons," added Mrs. Harrington.

"I am saved that danger, for I have no money," replied Eva.

"Nonsense, child! I know the value of land in Mallorca. I see already that you are being deceived."

She glanced significantly towards the captain, who was again smiling blandly.

"The matter has been fully gone into," explained Eve,

"by competent persons. The Val d'Erraha does not belong to me. It was held by my father only on 'rotas' —the Minorcan form of lease—and it has now been returned to the proprietor."

Mrs. Harrington's keen face dropped. She prided herself upon being a woman of business, and as such had always taken a deep interest in the affairs of other people. It is to be presumed that women have a larger mental grasp than men. They crave for more business when they are business-like, and thus by easy steps descend to mere officiousness.

Eve's story was so very simple and, to the ears of one who had known her father, so extremely likely, that Mrs. Harrington had for the moment nothing to say. She knew the working of the singular system on which land is to this day held in tenure in Majorca and Minorca, and there was no reason to suppose that there was any mistake or deception respecting the estate of the Val d'Erraha.

A dramatist of considerable talent, who is not sufficiently studied in these modern times, has said that a man in his time plays many parts. He left it to be understood that a woman plays only one. The business woman is the business woman all through her life—she is never the charitable lady, even for a moment.

Mrs. Harrington had wished to have the bringing out of a beautiful heiress. She had no desire to support a penniless orphan. The matter had, in her mind, taken the usual form of a contract in black and white. Mrs.

Harrington would supply position and a suitable home —Eve was to have paid for her own dresses—chosen by the elder contractor—and to have filled gracefully the gratifying, if hollow, position of a young person of means looking for a husband.

Mrs. Harrington's business habits had, in fact, kept her fully alive to the advantages likely to accrue to herself; and the small fact that Eve was penniless reduced these advantages to a mythical reward in the hereafter. And business people have not time to think of the hereafter.

It is possible that simple old Captain Bontnor in part divined these thoughts in the set grey eyes, the grey wrinkled face.

"You'll understand, marm," he said, "that my niece will not be in a position to live the sort o' life"—he paused, and looked round the vast room, quite without admiration—"the sort o' life you're livin' here. She couldn't keep up the position."

"It would not be for long," said Mrs. Harrington, already weighing an alternative plan. She looked critically at Eve, noting, with the appraising eye of a middle-aged woman of the world, the grace of her straight young form, the unusual beauty of her face. "If you could manage to allow her sufficient to dress suitably for one season, I dare say she would make a suitable marriage."

Eve turned on her with a flash of bright dark eyes.

"Thank you; I do not want to make a suitable marriage."

Captain Bontnor laid his hand on her arm.

"My dear," he said, "don't take any heed of her. She doesn't know any better. I have heard tell of such women, but——" he looked round the room, "I did not look to meet with one in a house like this. I did not know they called themselves ladies."

Mrs. Harrington gasped. She lived in a world where people think such things as these, but do not say them. Captain Bontnor, on the other hand, had not yet encountered a person of whom he was so much afraid as to conceal a hostile opinion, should he harbour such.

He was patting Eve's gloved hand as if she had been physically hurt, and Eve smiled down into his sympathetic old face. It is a singular fact that utter worldliness in a woman seems to hurt women less than it does men.

Mrs. Harrington, with frigid dignity, ignored Captain Bontnor, and addressed herself exclusively to Eve.

"You must be good enough to remember," she said, "that I can scarcely have other motives than those of kindness."

A woman is so conscious of the weak links in her chain of argument, that she usually examines them publicly.

"I do remember that," replied Eve, rather softened by the grey loneliness of this woman's life—a loneliness which seemed to be sitting on all the empty chairs—"and I am very grateful to you. I think, perhaps, my uncle misunderstood you. But——"

"Yes—but——"

"Under the circumstances, I think it will be wiser for me to accept his kind offer, and make my home with him. I hope to be able to find some work which will enable me to—to help somewhat towards the household expenses."

Mrs. Harrington shrugged her shoulders.

"As you like," she said. "After a few months of a governess' life perhaps you may reconsider your decision. I know——"

She was going to say that she knew what it was, but she recollected herself in time.

"I know," she said instead, "girls who have lived such lives."

With the air of Spain Eve Challoner seemed to have inhaled some of the Spanish pride, which is as a stone wall against which charity and pity may alike beat in vain. From her superior height the girl looked down on the keen-faced little woman.

"I am not in a position to choose," she said. "I am prepared for some small hardships."

Mrs. Harrington turned to ring the bell. With the sudden caprice which her money had enabled her to cultivate, she had taken a liking to Eve.

"You will have some tea?" she said.

Eve turned to thank her, and suddenly her heart leaped to her throat. She caught her breath, and did not answer for a moment.

"Thank you," she said; and her eyes stole back to

the mantelpiece, where a large photograph of Fitz seemed to watch her with a quiet, thoughtful smile.

The whole room appeared to be different after that. Mrs. Harrington seemed to be a different woman—the world seemed suddenly to be a smaller place and less lonely.

During the remainder of the short visit they talked of indifferent topics, while Captain Bontnor remained silent. Mrs. Harrington's caprice grew stronger, and before tea was over she said—

"My dear, if you will not come and live with me, at all events, make use of me. Your uncle will, no doubt, have to make some small changes in his household. I propose that you stay with me a week or ten days, until he is ready for you."

This with a slight conciliatory bow towards Captain Bontnor, who stared remorselessly at the clock.

"Thank you; I should very much like to," said Eve, mindful of the mantelpiece.

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CHAPTER XIV

A QUATRE

"There is so much that no one knows,
So much unreached that none suppose."

"I WANT you to put on a nice dress to-night. I have two friends coming to dine."

Eve looked up from the book she was reading, and Mrs. Harrington tempered her curt manner of expressing her wishes with a rare smile. She often did this for Eve's benefit, almost unconsciously. In some indefinite way she was rather afraid of this girl.

"I will do my best," answered Eve, her mind only half weaned from the pages.

She had been ten days in the house, and the somewhat luxurious comfort of it appealed to a faintly developed love of peace and ease, which had been filtered into her soul with the air of a Southern land. She had found it easier to get on with Mrs. Harrington than she at first anticipated. Her nature, which was essentially womanly, had in reality long craved for the intimate sympathy and intercourse which only another woman could supply. There was something indolent and restful in the very atmosphere of the house that supplied a

distinct want in the motherless girl's life. There were a number of vague possibilities of trouble in the world, half-perceived, half-divined by Eve; which possibilities Mrs. Harrington seemed capable of meeting and fending off.

It was all indefinite and misty, but Eve felt at rest, and, as it were, under protection, in the house of this hard, cold woman of the world.

"It can only be a black one," the girl answered.

"Yes; but people don't know what a black dress is until they have seen one that has been made in Spain."

Eve did not return at once to her book. She was, in fact, thinking about her dress—being in no way superior to such matters.

When she came down into the drawing-room an hour later, she found awaiting her there the two men about whom she thought most.

Cipriani de Lloseta and Fitz were standing on the hearthrug together. Mrs. Harrington had not yet come down. They came forward together, the Count taking her hand first, with his courteous bow. Fitz followed, shaking hands in silence, with that simplicity which she had learnt to look for and to like in him.

"I wonder," said Eve, "why Mrs. Harrington did not tell me that you were the two friends she expected to dinner?"

The Count smiled darkly.

"Perhaps our hostess does not know that we have

met before——" he began; and stopped suddenly when the door opened, and the rustle of Mrs. Harrington's silk dress heralded her coming.

Her quick eyes flashed over them with a comprehensive appreciation of the situation.

"You all seem to know each other," she said sharply. "I knew that Fitz had been of some service to you at D'Erraha; but I was not aware that you knew the Count de Lloseta."

"The Count de Lloseta was very kind to me at Barcelona—on a matter of business," explained Eve, innocently.

Mrs. Harrington turned upon the Spaniard quickly, but nevertheless too late to catch the warning frown which he had directed towards Eve. Mrs. Harrington looked keenly into his face, which was blandly imperturbable.

"Then you are the owner of D'Erraha?"

"I am."

Mrs. Harrington gave a strange little laugh.

"What a rich man you are!" she said. "Come! Let us go to dinner."

She took the Count's arm, and led the way to the dining-room. She was visibly absent-minded at first, as if pondering over something which had come as a surprise to her. Then she woke from her reverie, and, turning to Fitz, said—

"And what do you think of the Balcares?"

"I like them," returned Fitz, curtly.

He thought it was bad taste thus to turn the conversation upon a subject which could only be painful to Eve. He only thought of Eve, and therefore did not notice the patient endurance of the Count's face.

De Lloseta was taking his soup with a slow concentration of his attention upon its flavour, as if trying not to hear the conversation. Mrs. Harrington looked sharply at him, and in doing so failed to intercept a glance, exchanged by Fitz and Eve across the table.

"Why are you here?" Fitz seemed to be asking.

And Eve reassured him by a little smile.

"There is one advantage in your long exile at Mahon," pursued the hostess, inexorably. "It must have been economical. You could not have wanted money there."

Fitz laughed.

"Hardly so Arcadian as that," he said.

The Count looked up.

"I suppose," he said, "that the port where one does not want money is yet to be discovered?"

Mrs. Harrington, sipping her sherry, glanced at the speaker.

"Surely," she said lightly, "you are talking of what you know absolutely nothing."

"Pardon me"—without looking up.

Mrs. Harrington laughed.

"Ah," she said, "we three know too much about you to believe that. Now, what can a lone man like you want with money?"

"A lone man may happen to be saddled with a name of—well, of some repute—an expensive luxury."

"And you think that a great name is worth spending a fortune upon, like a garden, merely to keep it up?"

"I do."

"You think it worth all that?"

The dark, inscrutable eyes were raised deliberately to her face.

"Assuredly you must know that I do," he said.

Mrs. Harrington laughed, and changed the subject. She knew this man's face well, and her knowledge told her that he was at the end of his patience.

"So you saw Luke at Gibraltar?" she said, turning to Fitz.

"Yes, for a short time. I had never seen the *Croonah* before. She is a fine ship."

"So I understand. So fine, indeed, that two friends of mine, the Ingham-Bakers, were induced to go to Malta in her. There is no limit now to feminine enterprise. Mothers are wonderful, and their daughters no less so. *N'est-ce pas, Señor?*"

"All ladies are wonderful!" said the Count, with a grave bow. "They are as the good God made them."

"I don't agree with you there," snapped Mrs. Harrington. "So you saw the Ingham-Bakers also, Fitz?"

"Yes; they lunched with us."

"And Agatha was very pleasant, no doubt?"

"Very."

"She always is—to men. The Count admires her greatly. She makes him do so."

"She has an easy task," put in De Lloseta, quietly. It almost seemed that there was some feeling about Agatha between these two people.

"You know," Mrs. Harrington went on, addressing herself to Fitz, "that Luke and I have made it up. We are friends now."

Fitz did not answer at once. His face clouded over. Seen thus in anger, it was almost a hard face, older and somewhat worn. He raised his eyes, and they as suddenly softened, for Eve's eyes had met them, and she seemed to understand.

"I am not inclined to discuss Luke," he said quietly.

"My dear, I did not propose doing so," answered Mrs. Harrington, and her voice was so humble and conciliatory that De Lloseta looked up from his plate, from one face to the other.

That Mrs. Harrington should accept this reproof thus humbly seemed to come as a surprise to them all, except Fitz, who went on eating his dinner with a singular composure.

It would appear that Mrs. Harrington had been put out of temper by some small incident at the beginning of the dinner, and, like a spoilt child, proceeded to vent her displeasure on all and sundry. In the same way she would no doubt have continued, unless spoken sharply to, as Fitz had spoken.

For now her manner quite changed, and the rest of

the meal passed pleasantly enough. Mrs. Harrington now devoted herself to her guests, and as carefully avoided dangerous subjects as she had hitherto appeared to seek them.

After dinner she asked the Count to tune his violin, while she herself prepared to play his accompaniment.

Fitz lighted the candles and set the music ready with a certain neatness of hand rarely acquired by landsmen, and then returned to the smaller drawing-room, where Eve was seated by the fire, needlework in hand.

He stood for a moment leaning against the mantelpiece. Perhaps he was waiting for her to speak. Perhaps he did not realize how much there was in his long, silent gaze.

"How long have you been here?" he asked, when the music began.

"Ten days," she answered, without looking up.

"But you are not going to live here?"—with some misgiving.

"Oh no. I am going to live with my uncle in Suffolk."

He moved away a few steps to pick up a fallen newspaper. Presently he came back to her, resuming his former position at the corner of the mantelpiece.

It was Eve who spoke next—smoothing out her silken trifle of needlework and looking at it critically.

"I never thanked you," she said, "for all your kindness to me at D'Erraha. You were a friend in need."

It was quite different from what it had been at

D'Erraha. Possibly it was as different as were the atmospheres of the two places. Eve seemed to have something of London in the reserve of her manner—the easy insincerity of her speech. She was no longer a girl untainted by worldliness, sincere, frank, and open.

Fitz was rather taken aback.

"Oh," he answered, "I could not do much. There was really nothing that I could do except to stand by in case I might be wanted."

Eve took up her needle again.

"But," she said, "that is already something. It is often a great comfort, especially to women, to know that there is some one 'standing by,' as you call it, in case they are wanted."

She gave a little laugh, and then suddenly became quite grave. The recollection of a conversation they had had at D'Erraha had flashed across her memory, as recollections do—at the wrong time. The conversation she remembered was recorded at the time—it was almost word for word with this, but quite different.

Fitz was looking at her with his impenetrable simplicity.

"Will you oblige me," he said, "by continuing to look upon me in that light?"

She had bent her head rather far over her work as he spoke, and as he said the last five words her breath seemed to come with a little catch, as if she had pricked her finger.

The musicians were just finishing a brilliant performance, and before answering Fitz, she looked round

into the other room, nodded, smiled, and thanked them. Then she turned to him, still speaking in the light and rather indifferent tone which was so new to him, and said—

"Thank you very much, but of course I have my uncle. How—how long will you be—staying on shore? You deserve a long leave, do you not?"

"Yes, I suppose I do," said Fitz, absently. He had evidently listened more to the voice than the words. He forgot to answer the question. But she repeated it.

"How long do you get?" she asked, hopelessly conversational.

"About three weeks."

"Is that all? Ah! here is tea. I wonder whether I ought to offer to pour it out!"

But Mrs. Harrington left the piano and said that her sight was failing her. She had had enough music.

During the rest of the evening Fitz took one or two opportunities of looking at Eve to discover, if he could, what the difference was that he found in her. He had left a girl in Majorca—he found a woman in London. That was the whole difference; but he did not succeed in reducing it to so many words. He had passed most of his life at sea among men. He had not, therefore, had much opportunity of acquiring that doubtful knowledge—the knowledge of women—the only item, by the way, which men will never include among the sciences of existence. Already they know more about the stars than they do about women. Even if Fitz had possessed this

knowledge he would not have turned it to account. The wisest fail to do that. We only make use of our knowledge of woman in the study of those women with whom other men have to do.

"Fitz has got rather dull and stupid," said Mrs. Harrington, when the two guests had taken their leave.

Eve was folding up her work, and did not answer.

"Was he like that in Mallorca?" continued the grey lady.

"Oh—I think so. He was very quiet always."

Then Eve—the woman—cheerfully said good night, and went to her room. She carefully locked her door—then quite suddenly she began fumbling with extraordinary haste for her pocket-handkerchief, and she cast herself all dressed upon the bed.

CHAPTER XV

DON QUIXOTE

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

"COME down to my club and have a cigar!"

The Count stood under a yellow lamp enveloped in his fur-lined coat, looking with heavy, deep-browed eyes at his young companion.

Fitz paused. The Count had been kind to Eve. Fitz had noticed his manner towards the girl. He liked Cipriani de Lloseta—as many did—without knowing why.

"Thanks," he said, "I should like to."

The Count's club was a small and a very select one. It was a club with a literary tendency. The porter who took charge of their coats had the air of a person who read the heavier monthly reviews. He looked upon Fitz, as a man of outdoor tastes, with some misgiving.

The Count led the way up to the luxurious silent smoking-room, where a few foreign novels and a host of newspapers littered the tables.

As they entered the room a man looked up from his paper with some interest. He was a peculiar-looking man, with a keen face, streaked by suffering—a face that was always ready to wince. This man was a humourist, but he looked as if his own life had been a tragedy. He continued to look at De Lloseta and Fitz with a quiet scrutiny which was somewhat remarkable. It suggested the scrutiny of a woman who is taking notes of another's dress.

More particularly perhaps he watched the Count, and the keen eyes had a reflective look, as if they were handing that which they saw, back to the brain behind them for purpose of storage.

The Count met his eyes and nodded gravely. With a little nod and a sudden pleasant smile the other returned to the perusal of his evening paper.

Cipriani de Lloseta drew forward a deep chair, and with a courteous gesture invited Fitz to be seated. He took a similar chair himself, and then leant forward, cigar-case in hand.

"You know Mallorca," he said.

Fitz took a cigar.

"Yes," he answered, turning and looking into the Count's face with a certain honest interest. He was thinking of what Eve had said about this man. "Yes—I know Mallorca."

The Count struck a match and lighted his cigar with the air of a connoisseur.

"I am always glad," he said conversationally, "to

meet any one who knows Mallorca. It—was my home. Perhaps you knew ?"

And through the blue smoke the quick dark eyes flashed a glance.

"I saw your name—on the map," returned Fitz.

The Count gave a little Spanish deprecatory nod and wave of the hand, indicating that it was no fault of his that an historical name should have attached itself to him.

"Do you take whisky—and soda ?" inquired the Count.

"Thanks."

De Lloseta called the waiter and gave the order with a slight touch of imperiousness which was one of the few attributes that stamped him as a Spaniard. The feudal taint was still running in his veins.

"Tell me," he went on, turning to Fitz again, "what you know of the island—what parts of it—and what you did there."

In some ways Fitz was rather a simple person.

"Oh !" he answered unconsciously. "I went to D'Erraha mostly. I used to sail across from Ciudadela to Soller—along the coast, you know."

"And from Soller ?"

"From Soller I rode by the Valdemosa road, and then across the mountain and through that narrow valley up to the Val d'Erraha."

The Count was smoking thoughtfully.

"And you were happy there ?" he said.

Fitz looked pensively into his long tumbler.

"Yes."

"I also," said the Count. Then he seemed to remember his duties as host. "Is that cigar all right?" he asked.

"I think it is the best I have ever smoked," replied Fitz quietly, and the Count smiled.

The two men sat there in a long silence—each thinking his own thoughts. They were just the sort of men to do it. No other but Cipriani de Lloseta would have sat with that perfect composure, wrapt in an impenetrable Spanish silence, providing with grave dignity such a very poor evening's entertainment. And Fitz seemed quite content. He leant back, gravely smoking the good cigar. There seemed to be some point of complete sympathy between them—possibly the little sunlit island of the Mediterranean where they had both been happy.

The poem of a man's life is very deeply hidden, and civilization is the covert. The immediate outcome of civilization is reserve and—*nous voilà*. Are we not increasing our educational facilities with a blind insistence day by day? One wonders what three generations of cheap education will do for the world. Already a middle-aged man can note the slackening of the human tie. Railway directors, and other persons whose pockets benefit by the advance of civilization, talk a vast deal of rubbish about bringing together the peoples of the world. You can connect them, but you cannot bring

them together. Moreover, a connection is sometimes a point of divergence. In human affairs it is more often so than otherwise.

True, a generation lay between these two men, but it was not that that tied their tongues. It was partially the fact that Cipriani de Lloseta had moved with the times—had learnt, perhaps, too well, to acquire that reserve which is daily becoming more noticeable among men.

Nevertheless, it was he who spoke first.

"I asked you to come and smoke a cigar with me for a purpose," he said,

Fitz nodded.

"Yes," he answered; "I thought so."

A shadowy smile acknowledged this simple statement of a simple fact. The Count leant forward on his seat, resting his somewhat hollow cheek on his hand and his elbow on the arm of his chair.

"Some years ago," he said, "before you were born, I passed through a—well, a bad time. One of those times, I take it, when a man finds out the difference between a friend and an acquaintance. The circumstances would not interest you. They are essentially personal. Some men, and many women—I am not cynical, that is the last resource of one who has himself to blame, I am merely stating a fact—many women turned their backs upon me. There was, however, one man—an Englishman—who held to me with that unflinching courage of his own opinion which makes an

Englishman what he is. I accepted nothing from him at the time. In fact, he could do nothing for me. I think he understood. An Englishman and a Spaniard have much in common. He is dead now. It was the Caballero Challoner."

Fitz nodded. The Count changed his position slightly.

"I want you to use what influence you have with Miss Challoner. She is proud."

Fitz made no attempt to disclaim the implied influence.

"Yes," he said; "I know."

And he looked at the end of his cigar with a deep interest. The man who loves a proud woman loves her pride. He is also a happy man, because her pride will kill her vanity, and it is a woman's vanity that spoils a husband's love.

"It would be a great satisfaction to me," the Count went on, "to pay off in some small degree the debt of gratitude which I never even acknowledged to Challoner. Eve"—he paused, and repeated the name with a certain sense of enjoyment—"Eve is not fully equipped with worldly wisdom. Thank God, for I hate a worldly wise woman. She is hardly old enough or—plain enough to fight her own battles."

Fitz gave a sudden, sharp sigh, which made the Count pause for a moment.

"You also have received kindness from the late Caballero," went on the elder man, after a short silence.

Fitz nodded comprehensively.

"And, like myself," the Count continued, rather quickly, "you are naturally interested in his daughter, and sorry for her in her great change of circumstances. Now, it has occurred to me that together we might do something towards helping her. You know her better than I do. I only know that she is proud."

"Very much to her credit," put in Fitz, looking fixedly at his own boots.

"Entirely so. And I respect her for it. Unfortunately, assistance could hardly come from you—a young man. Whereas, I might be her grandfather."

He looked up with a smile—keen, black-haired, lithe of frame—a young man in appearance.

"We might help each other," he added, "you and I, quite alone. Captain Bontnor is a very worthy old fellow, but——" and he shrugged his shoulders. "We cannot leave her to the wayward charity of a capricious woman!" he added, with sudden bluntness.

He looked rather wonderingly at Fitz, who did not respond to this suggestion, as he had expected him to do. The coalition seemed so natural and so eminently practical, and yet the sailor sat coldly listening to each proposition as it fell from his companion's lips, weighing it, sifting it with a judicial, indifferent apathy.

The Count de Lloseta threw himself back in his chair, and awaited, with all the gravity of his race, the pleasure of his companion. At length Fitz spoke, rather deliberately.

"I think," he said, "you mistake the footing upon which I stand with respect to Miss Challoner. I shall be most happy to do all in my power; but I tell you frankly that it does not amount to much. I am indebted to her indirectly for some very pleasant visits to D'Erraha; her father was very kind to me. Hardly sufficient to warrant anything that would look like interference on my part."

The Count was too discreet a man to press the point any further.

"All this unfortunate difficulty would have been easily averted had I been less stupid. I shall never cease to regret it."

He spoke conversationally, flicking the end of his cigar neatly into the fire, and without looking at Fitz.

"I never foresaw the natural tendency of lawyers to complicate the affairs of life. My man in Palma was unfortunately zealous."

Fitz nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I was there."

Cipriani de Lloseta glanced at him sharply.

"I am glad of that," he said. "It was very stupid of me. I ought to have telegraphed to him to hold his tongue."

"But Miss Challoner could not have accepted the Val d'Erraha as a present?"

"Oh yes, she could, if she had not known. These little things are only a matter of sentiment."

Fitz leant forward, looking into the Count's face, without attempting to conceal his surprise.

"Do you mean to say you would have given it to her?" he asked.

"No; I should have paid it to her in settlement of a debt which I owed to her father."

The Count moved rather uneasily in his chair. His eyes fell before his companion's steady gaze.

"Another matter of sentiment," suggested Fitz.

De Lloseta shrugged his shoulders.

"If you will."

They lapsed into silence again. The Count was puzzled by Fitz, as Fitz in his turn had been puzzled earlier in the evening by Eve. It was merely the old story of woman the incomprehensible, and man the superior—the lord of the universe—puzzled, completely mystified, made supremely miserable or quite happy by her caprice of a moment.

It was a small thing that stood between these two men, preventing them from frankly co-operating in the scheme which both had at heart. It was nothing but the tone of a girl's voice, the studied silence of a girl's eyes, which had once been eloquent.

It was getting late. A discreet clock on the mantelpiece declared the hour of midnight in deliberate cathedral chime. Fitz looked up, but he did not move. He liked Cipriani de Lloseta. He had been prepared to do so, and now he had gone further than he had intended. He wanted him to go on talking about Eve,

for he thirsted in his dumbly enduring way for more details of her life. But he would not revert to the subject. Rather than that he would go on enduring.

While they were sitting thus in silence, the only other occupant of the room—the man with the pain-drawn face—rose from his seat, helping his legs with unsteady hands upon either arm of the chair. He threw the paper down carelessly on the table, and came across the room towards the Count de Lloseta. He was a surprisingly tall man when he stood up; for in his chair he seemed to sink into himself. His hair was grey—rather long and straggly—his eyes hazel, looking through spectacles wildly. His cheeks were very hollow, his chin square and bony. Here was a man of keen nerves and quick to suffer.

"Well," he said to Lloseta, "I haven't seen you for some time."

"I've been away."

The tall man looked down at him with the singular scrutiny already mentioned.

"Spain?"

"Spain."

He turned away with a little nod, but stopped before he had gone many paces.

"And when are you going to write those sketches of Spanish life?" he asked, with a cheery society laugh, which sounded rather incongruous. "Never, I suppose. Well, the loss is mine. Good night, Lloseta."

He went away without looking back.

"Do you know who that is?" the Count asked Fitz when the door was closed.

Fitz had risen, with his eye on the clock.

"No. But I seem to know his face."

The Count looked up with a smile.

"You ought to. That was John Craik."

CHAPTER XVI

BROKEN

"The Powers
Behind the world that make our griefs our gains."

THE small town of Somarsh, in Suffolk, consists of one street running up from the so-called harbour. At one end is the railway-station; at the other the harbour and the sea, and that is Somarsh. There are records that in days gone by—in the days of east coast prosperity—there was a Mayor of Somarsh, or Southmarsh, as it was then written. But Ichabod!

All Somarsh was in the street one morning after Fitz had gone to sea again, and those of the women who were not talking loudly were weeping softly. The boats were not in yet, but the weather was fine, and the still, saffron sea was dotted with brown sails. There was nothing wrong with the boats.

No; the trouble was on shore, as it mostly is. It came not from the sea, but from men. It was pinned upon the door of Merton's Bank in the High Street. Its form was unintelligible, for the wording of the notice was mostly outside the Suffolk vocabulary. There was something written in a clerkly hand about the withdrawal

of "financial facilities necessitating a stoppage of payment pending reconstruction."

But the people in the street were saying that Merton's was "broke." The constable said so, and he was a recognized authority on matters pertaining to dry land and the law. The door was locked on the inside, the shutters were up, the blinds down, as if mourning the death of a good East county credit.

"And thém a drivin' behind their two horses," said one old weather-beaten fisherman, who was suspected of voting on the wrong side at electioneering time.

Some shook their heads, but the word went no farther, for the man who does his business on the great waters has a vast respect for ancient institutions. And Merton's had been a good bank for many generations.

"P'raps," said an old woman who had nothing to lose —for the sea had even kept her corpses from her— "p'raps what they say 'bout reconstruction may be all right. But here comes the capt'n."

The crowd turned like one man and watched the advent of Captain Bontnor.

The old man was dressed in his best pilot cloth suit. He had worn it quite recklessly for the last month, ever since Eve had come to live with him. He had been interrupted in his morning walk—his quarter-deck tramp —forty times the length of his own railing in front of Malabar Cottage. The postman, bringing letters for Eve, had told him that there was trouble down in the town, and that he would likely be wanted.

When he saw where the crowd was stationed he caught his breath.

"No," he said aloud to himself, "no, it can't be Merton's."

And when he joined the townspeople they saw that his sunburnt, rugged face was grey as ashes.

"Mates," he said, "what is it?"

"Merton's is broke—Merton's is broke!" they answered, clearing a way for him to read the notice for himself. In Somarsh Captain Bontnor was considered quite a scholar. As such he might, perhaps, have deciphered the clerkly handwriting in a shorter time than he now required, but on the East coast a reputation is not easily shaken.

They waited for the verdict in silence. After five minutes he turned round, and his face gave some of them a shock. His kindly blue eyes had a painfully puzzled, incompetent look, which had often come across them in Barcelona and in London. But in Somarsh only Eve was familiar with it.

"Yes, mates," he said, falling back into his old seafaring vernacular, forgetful of his best suit, "yes, shipmates, as far as I rightly understand it, the bank's broken. And—and there's some of us that's ruined men."

He stood for a moment looking straight in front of him—looking very old and not quite fit for life's battle. Then he moved away.

"I'll just go and tell my niece," he said.

They watched him stump away—sturdy, unbroken, upright—still a man.

"It's a hard end to a hard life," said the old woman who had suggested hope; and being only human, they fell to discussing the event from the point at which it affected their own lives.

Malabar Cottage stood at the top end of the High Street—almost by itself—looking out over the little green plot of common land, where the coastguard flagpost stands towards the sea. It was a low-roofed, solidly built cottage—once a coastguard station, but superseded in the heydey of East coast smuggling by a larger station further up the hill. There was a little garden in front, which the captain kept himself, growing such old-fashioned flowers as were content with his ignorant handling. The white jasmine ran riot over the portico.

Eve had apparently received a letter of some importance, for she was standing at the gate waiting for him. She ran out hatless to see him on his quarter-deck, and to her surprise found him not. She soon saw him coming, however, and to beguile the time fell to reading her letter a second time, with a little frown, as if the caligraphy gave her trouble.

She did not look up until he was quite close.

"Uncle," she cried, "what is the matter?"

He gave a smile, which was painfully out of place on his bluff features—it was wan and twisted.

"Nothing, my dearie; nothing."

He fumbled at the gate, and she had to find the latch for him.

"Just come below—I mean indoors, my dear. I've had some news. I dare say it will be all right—but just at first, you understand, it is a little—keen."

He bustled through the porch, and Eve followed him. She watched him hang up his old straw hat, standing on tiptoe with a grunt, as was his wont.

"I must unship that peg and put it a bit lower," he said, as he had said a hundred times before.

Then he went into the little dining-room and sat somewhat heavily down with his two hands resting on his knees. He looked puzzled.

"Truth is, my dear," he said breathlessly, "I don't seem to take to this long-shore life. I—I rather think of going back to sea. There's plenty will give me a ship. And I want you to keep this cottage nice for me, dearie, against my coming home."

He paused, looking round the room with a poor simulation of interest at the quaint ornaments and curiosities which he had brought home from different parts of the world. He looked at the ceiling and the carpet—anywhere, in fact, except at Eve. Then he pushed his fingers through his thick grey hair, making it stand on end in a ludicrous manner.

"I've got all my bits of things collected here—just bits of things—oh, dear!—oh, dear—Eve, my child, I wonder why the Almighty's gone and done this?"

Eve was already sitting on the arm of his chair stroking back his hair with her tender fingers.

"What is it, uncle?" she asked. "Tell me."

"Merton's," he answered. "Merton's, and them so safe!"

"Is it only money?" cried Eve. "Is that all?"

"Yes," he answered rather wearily, "that's all. But it's money that's took me fifty-five years to make."

"And had you it all in Merton's Bank?"

"Yes, dearie, all."

"But are you sure they have failed—that there is no mistake?"

"Quite sure. I've read it myself pinned on the door, and the shutters up, like a thing you read of in the newspapers. No, it's right. There's not often a mistake about bad news."

Eve bent over him very tenderly and kissed him. He was holding her hand between his, patting it gently with his rough, weather-beaten fingers. He was looking straight in front of him with that painful look of helplessness which had earned him the friendship of Lord Seahampton in Barcelona.

"But," said the girl at length, "you cannot go to sea again."

She knew that he would never get a ship, for his seamanship, like all other things that were his, was hopelessly superannuated. He was not fit to be trusted with a ship—no owner would dream of it, no crew would sail under him.

"There's men," said the captain humbly, "who learnt their seamanship from me—who sailed under me—p'raps one of them would give me a berth as first mate or even second mate under him—for a shipmate they would do it."

Captain Bontnor had fallen behind the times even in his sentiments. He did not know that in these days of short voyages, of Seamen's Unions, and Firemen's Friendlies and Stokers' Guilds, a shipmate is no longer a special friend—the tie is broken, as are many other ties, by the advance of education.

Then the old man pulled himself together, and smiled bravely at his niece.

"It is not for myself that I'm worrying," he said, "but for you. I don't quite see my way clear yet. It's sort of sharp and sudden. I cannot get the poor Mertons out of my head—people that have been accustomed to their carriages and all. It's hard for them! You see, what they say is that their financial facilities have been withdrawn, and I dare say nobody is to blame. It is just what they call the hand of God, in a bill of lading—just the hand of God."

"Yes, dear," answered Eve. "And now I am going to serve out a glass of sherry; you want it after your quick walk. That is what you did at sea, you served it out, did you not?"

"He, he! yes, dearie; that is it."

His rugged hand shook as he drank the wine.

"Only," he went on, after wiping his moustache

vigorously with a red pocket-handkerchief—"only it was rum, dearie—rum, you know, for heavy weather. It puts heart into the men."

His face suddenly clouded over again.

"And we've run into heavy weather, haven't we? Just the hand of God."

"Finish the glass," said Eve, and she stood over him while he drank the wine.

"And now," she went on, "listen to me. I have had a very important letter, which could hardly have come at a more opportune moment. In fact, I think we may call it also . . . what they say in a bill of lading."

She opened the letter, as if about to read it aloud, and on glancing through she seemed to change her mind.

"It is from Mrs. Harrington," she said. "It is a very kind letter."

She looked at her uncle, whose face had suddenly hardened. He seemed to be schooling himself to hear something unpleasant.

"Ay!" he muttered, "ay! I suppose she'll get her way now. I suppose I can't hope to keep you now. She'll get you—she'll get you."

"Then I think you are a very mean old man," exclaimed Eve. "I don't believe you are a sailor at all. You are what you call a land-lubber, if you think that I am the sort of person to accept your kindness when you are prosperous, and then—and then when heavy weather comes to go away and leave you."

The old man smiled rather wanly, and fumbled with the red pocket-handkerchief.

"As it happens, Mrs. Harrington does not ask me to go and stay with her—she asks me——" She paused and laid her hand on his shoulder gently. "She asks me —to accept money."

Captain Bontnor sat upright.

"Ay-y-y," he said, "charity."

"Yes," said Eve, quietly, "charity, and I'm going to accept it."

Captain Bontnor scratched his head. His manners were not, as has already been stated, remarkable for artificiality or superficial refinement. He screwed up his features as if he were swallowing something nasty.

"Read me the letter," he said.

Eve opened the missive again, and looked at it.

"She puts it very nicely," she said. "She asks if you will permit me to accept a dress allowance from a rich woman who does not always spend her money discreetly."

It must be admitted that Mrs. Harrington's nice way of putting it lost nothing by its transmission through Eve's lips.

Thus poor Charity creepeth in wherever she can shelter. She is not proud. She does not ask to be accepted for her own sake, though Heaven knows she frequently is. She masquerades in any costume—she accepts the humiliation of any disguise. She is ready to be cast down before swine, or raised high before the eyes of fools. She is used as a tool or a stepping-stone—the

humble handmaid of the tuft-hunter and the toady. She is dragged through the mire of the slums to the dwellings of the wealthy and idle. She is hounded up and down the world—the plaything of Fashion, the trap of the unwary, the washerwoman of the unclean who wish to try the paths of virtue—for a change. And she is still Charity, and she lives strong and pure in herself. It has been decreed that we shall ever have the poor beside us, and so long shall we also possess those who live on them.

Charity begetteth charity, and it was for Charity's sake that Eve Challoner took the bitter bread to herself, and accepted Mrs. Harrington's offer.

Her own pride lay between her and this woman whom she knew to be capricious, uncertain, lacking the quality of justice. Her duty towards Captain Bontnor lay between her and high Heaven.

So Eve Challoner learnt her first lesson in that school where we all are called to study sooner or later—the school of Adversity; where some of us pass creditably, while others are ploughed, and a few—a very few—take honours.

BOOK THE SECOND

CHAPTER I

BITS OF LIFE

"Some far-off touch
Of greatness, to know well I am not great."

THE local house-agent anticipated no difficulty in letting Malabar Cottage, furnished, at a good weekly rental; and in due course a dreamy clergyman, with a wife who was anything but dreamy, came and saw and hired. The wide-awake wife was so interested in Eve that she forgot to settle several details which came to her mind afterwards. Her curiosity was so aroused that the special cupidity belonging to the wife of the dreamy clergyman was for the moment allayed, and she forgot to drive a hard bargain.

Moreover, Eve's manner was not exactly encouraging to the would-be bargainer. A stupendous ignorance of the tricks of furnished house-letting, combined with a certain lofty contempt for detail, acquired in Spain, where such contempt is thoroughly understood, completely baffled the clergyman's wife. She concluded that

Eve was a very stupid and ignorant girl, a poor housekeeper, and an incompetent woman of the world; and yet she was afraid of her, simply because she did not understand her. Jews, poor men's wives, and other persons who live by haggling, have a subtle fear of those who will not haggle.

So Malabar Cottage was let; and in due time the sad day arrived when Captain Bontnor had to bid farewell to his "bits of things." These "bits of things" were in reality bits of his life—and a human life is not so long nor so interesting an affair that we can afford lightly to break off any portion, to throw it away, or even to let it out on hire.

Captain Bontnor wandered rather disconsolately round the rooms after breakfast, and as Eve was with him he gave her a short inventory of these pieces of his life.

"That there harpoon," he said, pointing to a rusty relic on the wall above the mantelpiece, "was given to me by the finest whaling captain that ever found his way into the North water. When I first went to sea I thought I'd like to be a whaler; but two voyages settled that fancy. I'm told they shoot their harpoons out of a gun nowadays—poor sport that! And there's no sport like whalin'. Two thousand pounds at one end of a line and your own life at the other—that's finer sport than these Cockney partridge-shooters know of.

"And that's my seal-pick—many a seal have I killed with that. That there's the portrait of the *True Love*, three-masted schooner, built at Littlehampton by Harvey.

Sailed second mate, first mate, and master in her, I did. Then she was sold; and a lubber went and—and threw her on the Kentish Knock in a south-easterly gale. She was a pretty ship! I felt the loss as if she'd been my sweetheart—the pretty little *True Love!*

"That string of shells was given to me by a shipmate—old Charlie Sams—to bring home for his wife. He picked 'em up on the beach above James Town. Took yellow Jack, he did, and died in my arms—and he only had the shells to send to his young wife and a bit of a baby he was always botherin' and talkin' about. I did two cross voyages, and one of them round the Horn, before I got home, and I couldn't find the woman, she having moved. So when I left the sea, I just hung them up in case she happened to come along by chance and see them with his portrait underneath. That's Charlie Sams—a bit brown and faded. She won't come along now, I suppose. It is a matter of fifty-five years since Charlie died."

As he wandered round the house, so he wandered on in his reminiscences, until Eve led him out of the front door. He took his hat from the peg which he had been intending to unship and refix at a lower level for the last fifteen years, and followed her meekly into the garden. He paused to pick up some yellow jasmine leaves which had withered in the warmth of the May sun and fallen on the doorstep. Then he looked back longingly.

"You see," said Eve, cheerfully, "it is only for a few

months. We can always let it in the summer like this, and live luxuriously on our rent in the winter."

He threw back his shoulders and smiled bravely, trying to banish the thought of his "bits of things."

"Yes, dearie, it's only for a few months—only for a few months."

And they both knew that they could not hope to live in Malabar Cottage again—not, at all events, on the rent paid by the clergyman's wife.

They had taken lodgings in a small house near the harbour, which, as Eve pointed out, was much more convenient for the shops; and, besides, they could now buy their fish out of the boats. This last theory she propounded with a grave assumption of housekeeping knowledge which did not fail to impress Captain Bontnor.

The whole town knew of the captain's misfortune, and half the citizens of Somarsh shared in it. Only those who had saved nothing lost nothing, for Merton's was the only bank on the coast; and more than one old fisherman—bent with rheumatism, crippled by the hardships of a life spent half in the water, half on it—saw his savings—the fruit of long, toilsome years—go to pay the London tradesmen a part of what young Merton owed them. It was the old, oft-repeated tale of over-education. A country banker's son sent to public school and university to be educated out of country banking and into nothing else.

Captain Bontnor was quite penniless. During his long life he had saved nearly four thousand pounds, and

this sum he had placed on deposit with the Somarsh bankers, living very comfortably on the interest. The whole of this was absorbed—a mere drop in the financial ocean.

Mrs. Harrington had asked Eve to accept a dress allowance of forty pounds a year, and Eve accepted—for her uncle. Besides this she had a little ready money—the result of the sale of the contents of the Casa d'Erraha. A person who looked like a butler or a major-domo had gone over from Barcelona to Palma to attend this sale; and the local buyers laughed immoderately at him in their sleeves. He was, they opined, a mule—he did not know the value of things, and paid double for all he bought.

But the proceeds of the sale did not amount to much. Eve knew that something must be done. The money would soon be exhausted, and they could not live on the dress allowance. Since the failure of the bank, Captain Bontnor's mental grasp had seemed less reliable than ever, and Eve had kept these things to herself.

The captain's one servant—an aged female—who ruined his digestion and neglected her dusting, was prevailed upon to return to her people, and Eve and her uncle settled down to their restricted life in the lodgings which were so conveniently near the fishing harbour.

The captain was too old to break off his habits of life, so he walked his quarter-deck tramp, backwards and forwards beneath the window on the clean pavement of the High Street, which broadened out to the harbour.

He went down to meet the boats, where he was ever a welcome onlooker, and he never came back without fish for which no payment had been taken.

He usually met the postman when he was keeping his watch on deck—beneath the little bay-window—and if there was a letter for Eve, he would pause in front of the house, and hand it through the open sash.

He did this one morning after they had been in the lodgings a month, and he had not added two turns to the regulation forty before Eve called to him. He bustled in at the door, hung his old straw hat on a peg, which was likewise too high, and went into the little parlour. As he was smoking he stood in the doorway, for he had not yet got over his immense respect for the niece who was above him.

"Yes, dearie?" he said. "What to do now?"

Eve was standing near the window, holding a letter in her hand.

"Listen!" she said, and spreading out her elbows she read grandly:—

"Madam,—I like your Spanish Notes and Sketches; but I cannot put in number one until I see number two. Send me more, or better still, if convenient, when you are next in town, do me the honour of calling here."

"Yours very truly——"

"Now listen, uncle."

"Yes, dear!"

"Yours very truly,
"JOHN CRAIK."

"Lor!" ejaculated Captain Bontnor, "the gentleman that writes."

Eve handed him the letter, which he held, awestruck, with the tip of his thumb and finger.

"He doesn't write very well—he, he!" he added with a chuckle. "I'm afraid it's no good my trying to read it without my glasses."

He blinked at the crabbed spidery caligraphy, and handed the letter back.

"It is signed John Craik, but Providence held the pen," said Eve. "If this letter had not come I should have had to leave you, uncle. I should have had to go and be a governess. And I do not want to leave you—not at all."

The old man's eyes filled suddenly, as old eyes sometimes will. He stuffed his pipe into his pocket and took her two hands in his, patting them tenderly.

He did not speak for some time, but stood blinking back the tears.

"Then God bless John Craik!" he said, "God bless him."

They sat down to talk this thing over, forgetful of the Captain's pipe, which burnt a hole in the lining of his coat. There was so much to be discussed. Eve had written a certain number of short essays—painfully conscious all the while of their simplicity and faultiness. She did not know that so long as a person has his subject at his finger-ends, simplicity is rather to be commended than otherwise. It is the half-informed who are verbose.

She had written simply of the simple life which she knew so well. She had depicted Spanish daily life from the keenly instinctive standpoint of a woman's observation; and only a week before she had sent a single essay—marked number one—to the editor of *The Commentator*, John Craik.

She had written for money, and made no disguise of her motive. Here was no literary lady with all the recognized adjuncts except the literature. Eve did not wear square-toed shoes and spectacles. She had a very womanly regard for her personal appearance. She had no thirst for that very transient glory that emanateth from the printing press. She did not write in order that she might talk of having written. She did not talk in such flowing periods and with such overbearing wisdom that insincere friends in sheer weariness were called upon to suggest that she should and could write.

In sending her first small attempt to John Craik she had not forwarded therewith a long explanatory letter, which reticence had made him read the manuscript.

Eve read the great man's letter a second time, while the captain scratched his head and watched her.

"And," he said meekly, "what do you think of doing?"

Eve looked up with a happy smile.

"What he tells me," she answered. "Oh, I am so glad, uncle; I cannot tell you how glad I am."

The captain shuffled awkwardly on his feet.

"I'm more than glad," he said. "I'm sorter proud."

He pulled down his coat and walked to the window.

"Yes," he said, looking out into the street. "That's it. I'm proud. It's a great gift—writin'. A great gift."

Eve laughed.

"Oh!" she answered. "I'm afraid that I have no gift. It is a very, very minute talent. That is all. I always liked books, but I have not the gift of writing them."

Captain Bontnor had had much time during his seafaring life—when the weather was fine—to think out certain solid facts for himself. And he knew as well as any one of us that gifts of this sort are rarely given to women. They are only lent for a while; until the time comes for them to fill the higher sphere for which they have the undeniable gift. Some few women—to-day as in all times, though we hear more of them in these cheap printing days—think themselves too good for this sphere. But such as these need not be heeded overmuch. It was only the fox who saw no sweetness in the grapes.

Captain Bontnor never thought Eve was a great authoress. In his simple way this man had a vast deal of discrimination, as simple people often have. It is the oversubtle man who makes the most egregious mistakes, because most of us have not time to be subtle. He never suspected Eve of being a great authoress, and he never attributed to her any desire to attain that doubtful pinnacle of fame. But he saw very plainly the immense advantage to be gathered in this time from her talent.

Here was an occupation which she could follow at home under his care—as tender as that of a mother—without losing any of that bloom of maidenhood which gets rubbed off in contact with the world and leaves the woman different ever afterwards. In his simplicity he hoped that something would turn up for him to do, in a world which has no pity nor charity for that which is old, effete, and out of fashion.

"Yes," he said, after deep thought, "we must do what he tells us. There's no harm in that."

Eve laughed.

"I thought," she said, "that we understood pride in Spain and Mallorca; but I have never met such a proud caballero as you."

She was standing behind him where he stood, looking grimly out of the window, her two hands resting on his broad shoulders. Her chin just touched his gray hair. He put up his two hands, which completely covered hers, and gave a little grunt expressive of great love.

"I suppose," she went on, "that you have once or twice humbled your pride so much as to accept a ship when it was offered you. You said that there are plenty who would give you a command now. John Craik is giving me a ship, that is all."

The Captain nodded.

"Yes," he said, "that's it, that's it. You've got your first ship."

"And," went on Eve, "we must do as we are told. We must forget that we ever were proud. I will try and

write two more articles, and when we are paid for the first we will go up to London and see Mr. John Craik."

Again the Captain reflected.

"Yes," he said, "we'll do that. And I'll just sit outside in the cab. John Craik doesn't want to see me."

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CHAPTER II

A COMPACT

"Prends moy tel que je suy."

THE tendency of the age is to peep behind the scenes. The world is growing old, and human nature is nearly worn through; we are beginning to see the bare bones of it. But a strange survival of youthfulness is that remarkable fascination of the unseen—the desire to get behind the scenes and see the powder for ourselves. If a man makes his livelihood by lifting horses and other heavy objects from the earth, we immediately wish to know details of his private life, and an obliging journalist interviews him. If another write a book, we immediately wish to know how he does it, where, when, and why. We also like to see his portrait on the fly-leaf—or *he* likes to see it there. This is one of the undecided questions of the day, namely, whether the author or the public is the more pleased to see the plain features of a stout person in spectacles on the first page of a story of "derring-do," written in the first person singular. The simplest reader must notice that the story or the portrait cannot well be true. Deeds of "derring-do"

and spectacles do not assimilate. Another question yet open is, by the way, that little matter of interviews. The interviewed invariably say that they cannot help it, but the worldly wise do not believe them.

Eve Challoner was lamentably behind the spirit of the age in that she did not know how she wrote a series of articles destined to attain renown. But as she never went out to meet the interviewer, he never came to her. She fell into a habit of going for long walks by herself, and in the course of these peregrinations she naturally acquired the custom of thinking about her writing.

During these long walks Captain Bontnor remained at home alone, or joined a knot of fellow-mariners on the green in front of the reading-room. When Eve came home with her mind full of matter to be set down on paper he discreetly went to keep his watch on deck—backwards and forwards on the pavement in front of the window. At each turn the old sailor paused to cast his eye over the whole horizon, after the manner of mariners, as if he were steering Somarsh across the North Sea.

Thus uncle and niece glided imperceptibly into that mode of life which is called humdrum, and which some wise people consider the best mode of getting through existence. Sketch number two was written, rewritten, liked, hated, and finally sent to John Craik, with a letter explaining that the writer lived in Suffolk, and could not for the moment make it convenient to go to London. John Craik was a busy man. He made no answer, and in a few days the proof of sketch number

one arrived, with a little printed notice of instructions as to correcting and returning. Of all fleeting glamours that of the proof-sheet is assuredly lightest on the wing, and Eve duly hated her own works in print, as we all do hate our first triumphs. Afterwards we get resigned—much as we grow resigned to the face we see in the looking-glass.

At this time Captain Bontnor conceived the idea that it was incumbent upon him to take up seriously, though late in life, the higher walks of literature.

"Now," he said to Eve one evening, when the first proof had been almost wept over, "now, dearie, what author would you recommend to a man who has a natural likin' for reading, but owing to the circumstances of his life has had no opportunity of cultivatin' his taste?"

"Well, uncle, a good deal would depend upon his inclination—whether he liked poetry or fiction, or serious reading."

"Of course, of course," acceded Captain Bontnor, pressing the tobacco into his pipe with his thumb; "I am taking that into consideration. There's all sorts to be had now, ain't there—poetry and fiction and novels? I am not sure that the style would matter much, so long—so long as the print was nice and clear."

Eve duly gave her opinion without pressing the question too closely, and while she was out on her long walks Captain Bontnor laboriously cultivated his neglected taste. He sat in the window seat with much gravity,

and more than made up in application for the youthful quickness which he lacked. He resolutely refused to look up from his book when he heard the alternate thud and stump which announced the passage down to the harbour of his particular crony, Mark Standon, whose other leg had been buried at sea. He kept the dictionary beside him, and when the writer used a word of sonorous ring and obscure meaning he gravely looked it out.

The first time that Mr. Standon saw his friend thus engaged he stood on the pavement and expressed his surprise with more force than elegance; whereupon Captain Bontnor went out and explained to him exactly how it stood. So marked was the old sailor's influence on the social affairs of Somarsh that there was a notable revival of literary taste and discussion at the corner of the Lifeboat House, where the local intellect assembled.

Captain Bontnor was engaged one day in the study of an author called Dickens, to whose works he had not yet found time to devote his full attention, when a strange footstep on the pavement made him look up. It certainly was not Standon's halting gait, and a lack of iron nail certified to the fact that it was no Somarsh man. The Captain looked over his spectacles and saw Cipriani de Lloseta studying the numbers on the doors as he came down the quiet little street.

The sight caused the old sailor rather a shock. He abandoned the study of Mr. Dickens and took off his

spectacles. Then he scratched his head—always an ominous sign. His first instinct was to go and open the door; then he remembered that the new-comer was a nobleman who lived in a palace, and that he himself was indirectly a gentleman, inasmuch as he lived in the same house as a lady—his niece. So he sat still and allowed the landlady to open the door.

When Cipriani de Lloseta was ushered into the tiny room he found the Captain half-bowing on the hearth-rug.

"Captain Bontnor," he said, with all the charm of manner which was his, "this is a pleasure."

The Captain shook hands, and with the rough hospitality of the cabin drew forward his own arm-chair, which the Count took at once.

"When last we met," he said, "I had the privilege of receiving you at my house in Barcelona—a poor dark place in a narrow street. Now here you have a sea view."

"But this is not my house," said Captain Bontnor, feeling unaccountably at ease with this nobleman. "Malabar Cottage is farther up the hill. I've got all my bits of things up there."

"Indeed. It would have given me pleasure to see them. I learnt from a mutual—friend, Mrs. Harrington, of your change of address."

Captain Bontnor looked at him keenly; and who shall say that the rough old man did not appreciate the refined tact of his visitor.

"I've had losses," he said.

The Count nodded shortly. He was drawing off his gloves.

"I do not know," he said conversationally, "if it has been your experience, but for myself I have found that reverses of fortune are not without some small consolation. They prove the friendship of one's friends."

The Captain reflected.

"Yes," he said, "you're right, Mr.—I mean Count—and—and brings the good out of women."

"Women!" the Count repeated gravely. "You refer to Miss Challoner—I see signs of her presence in this room. Is she out?"

"Yes—I am afraid she is." He glanced nervously at the clock. "She is not likely to be in for an hour and more yet."

"I am sorry," said the Count; "but also I am rather glad. I shall thus have an opportunity of asking your opinion upon one or two matters—between men of the world, you know."

"I am afraid my opinion is not of much value, sir, except it's about schooners—I always sailed in schooners."

The Count nodded gravely.

"In my country," he said, "we usually go in for brigs; they find them easier to handle. But you know Mallorca—you have seen for yourself."

The Captain was not listening; he was looking at the modest lodging-house side-board.

"I was wondering," he explained with a transparent simplicity which was perhaps as good as that which is called good breeding, "whether you would take a glass of sherry wine."

"I should like nothing better," said the Count. "It will give me pleasure to take a glass of wine with you."

Quietly, imperceptibly, De Lloseta set Captain Bontnor at his ease, and at the same time he mastered him. They spoke of indifferent topics—topics which, however, were well within the Captain's knowledge of the world. Then suddenly the Count laid aside the social mask which he wore with such consummate ease.

"I came down to Somarsh," he said, "because I am deeply distressed at your reverse of fortune. I came to see you, Captain, because when I had the pleasure of meeting you at Barcelona I saw you to be a just man, and one to whom one could speak openly. I am a rich man—you understand. Need I say more?"

Captain Bontnor blinked uncertainly.

"No," he answered, "I'm thinkin' it isn't necessary."

"Not between men of the world," urged Cipriani de Lloseta. "It is not for your sake. I would not insult you in such a way. It is for Eve. For a woman's sake a man may easily sacrifice his pride."

The Captain nodded and glanced at the clock. He had not fully realized until that moment how dependent he was upon his niece.

"You know," continued the Count, following up his advantage, "all the somewhat peculiar circumstances of

the case. Do you think there is any chance of Eve's reconsidering her decision?"

The Captain shook his head.

"No," he answered bluntly, "I don't. Since she came back from London——" he paused.

"Yes, since she came back from London?" suggested the Count.

"She seems more determined than ever."

The Count was looking at him keenly.

"Then," he said, "you also have noticed a change."

Captain Bontnor shuffled in his seat and likewise in his speech.

"I suppose," he said, "that she has grown into a woman. Adversity's done it."

"Yes," said the Count, "your observations seem to me to be correct. I had the pleasure of seeing her once or twice when she was staying at Mrs. Harrington's; but I did not refer to the question raised at my house in Barcelona because I noticed the change to which you allude. Instead, I attempted to gain the co-operation and assistance of a mutual friend, Henry Fitz-Henry."

Cipriani de Lloseta paused and looked at his companion, who in turn gazed stolidly at the fire.

"And I received a rebuff," added the Count. He waited for some little time, but Captain Bontnor had no comment to offer, so De Lloseta went on: "The Caballero Challoner was one of my best friends. I do not feel disposed to let the matter drop, more especially now that you have been compelled to leave Malabar

Cottage. I propose entreating Miss Challoner to reconsider her decision. Will you help me?"

"Yes," answered Captain Bontnor, "I will."

"Then tell me if Eve has accepted assistance from Mrs. Harrington?"

"Yes, she has."

The Count swore softly in Spanish.

"I am sorry for that," he said aloud. "I am superstitious. I have a theory that Mrs. Harrington's money is apt to be a curse to those upon whom it is bestowed."

"Mrs. Harrington's no friend of mine," said Captain Bontnor; and De Lloseta, who was looking out of the window, smiled somewhat grimly.

"Perhaps," he said after a little pause, "perhaps you will allow me to claim the privilege which you deny to her?"

"Yes," answered Captain Bontnor, awkwardly; "yes, if you care to."

"Thanks. I see Miss Challoner—Eve—coming. I count on your assistance."

Eve paused on the threshold in astonishment at the sight of the Count de Lloseta and her uncle in grave discourse over a glass of sherry.

"You!" she said. "You here!"

And he wondered why she suddenly lost colour.

"I," he answered, "I—here to pay my respects."

Eve gave a little gasp of relief. For a moment she was off her guard—with a dangerous man watching her.

"I thought you had bad news," she said.

And Cipriani de Lloseta knew that this was a woman whose heart was at sea.

"No," he answered; "I merely came to quarrel."

He drew forward a chair, and Eve sat down.

"We shall always quarrel," he went on, "unless you are kind. Let us begin at once and get it over, because I want to stay to lunch. Will you reconsider your decision with respect to the Val d'Erraha?"

Eve shook her head and looked at her uncle.

"No," she answered; "I cannot do that. Not now."

"Some day?" he suggested.

"Not now," repeated the girl, and looking up her face suddenly became grave, as if reflecting the expression in the dark Spanish eyes bent upon her.

"You are cruel!" he said.

"I am young——"

"Is it not the same thing?"

"And I can work," added Eve.

"Yes," he said. "But in my old-fashioned way I am prejudiced against a lady working. In the days of women's rights ladies are apt to forget the charm of white hands."

Eve made no answer.

"Then it is not peace?"

"No," she answered with a smile; "not yet."

She was standing beside Captain Bontnor with her hand on his shoulder.

"Uncle and I," she added, "are not beaten yet."

Cipriani de Lloseta smiled darkly.

"Will you promise me one thing," he said: "that when you are beaten you will come to me before you go to any one else."

"Yes," answered Eve, "I think we can promise that."

CHAPTER III

BAFFLED

"He conquers who awaits the end."

FORTUNE fixed her wayward fancy on the first sketch that Eve contributed to the *Commentator*. Wayward, indeed, for Eve herself knew that it was not good, and in the lettered quiet of the editorial sanctum John Craik smiled querulously to himself. John Craik had a supreme contempt for the public taste, but he knew exactly what it wanted. He was like a *chef* smiling over his made dishes. He did not care for the flavour himself, but his palate was subtle enough to detect the sweet or bitter that tickled his master's tongue. He served the public faithfully, with a twisted, cynic smile behind his spectacles—for John Craik had a family to feed. He knew that Eve's work was only partially good —true woman's work that might cease to flow at any moment. But he detected the undeniable originality of it, and the public palate likes a novel flavour.

So deeply versed was he in worldly knowledge, so thoroughly had he gauged the critic, the journalist, and the public, that before he unfolded a newspaper he could usually foresee the length, the nature, and the literary

merit of the criticism. He knew that the tendency of the age is to acquire as much knowledge as possible in a short time. He looked upon the world as a huge kindergarten, and the *Commentator* as its schoolbook. It was good that the world's knowledge of its own geography should be extended, but the world must not be allowed to detect the authority of the usher's voice. There are a lot of people who, like women at a remnant sale, go about the paths of literature picking up scraps which do not match, and never can be of the slightest use. It was John Craik's business to set out his remnant counter to catch these wandering gleaners, and Eve sent him her wares by a lucky chance at the moment when he wanted them.

The editor of the *Commentator* was sitting in his deep chair before the fire one morning about eleven o'clock, when the clerk, whose business it was to tell glib lies about his chief, brought him a card.

"Lloseta," said Craik aloud, to himself. "Ask him to come up."

"The man who ought to have written the Spanish sketches," he commented when the clerk had left.

The Count came into the room with a certain ease of manner subtly indicative of the fact that it was not the first time that he visited it. He shook hands and waited until the clerk had closed the door.

There was a copy of the month's *Commentator* on the table. De Lloseta took it up and opened it at the first page.

"Who wrote that?" he asked, holding out the magazine.

Craik laughed—a sudden boyish laugh—but he held his sides the while.

"You not only beard the lion in his den, but you ask him to tell you the tricks of his trade," he said. "Sit down, all the same. You don't mind my pipe, do you?"

The Spaniard sat down and sought a cigarette case in his waistcoat pocket with a deliberation that made his companion fidget in his chair.

"You asked me to write those sketches," said the Count, pleasantly. "I delayed, and you gave the order to some one else. Assuredly I have a certain right to ask who my supplanter is."

"None whatever, my dear Lloseta. I did not give the order for those sketches—they came."

"From whom?"

"Ah!"

"You will not tell me?"

"My dear man, I cannot. The smell of printing ink is not good for a man's morals. Leave me my unsullied honour."

The Count had lighted his cigarette. He looked keenly at his companion's deeply-lined face, and the blue smoke floated between them.

"There are not many people who could have written that article," he said. "For the few English who know Spain like that are known to the natives. And no Spaniard would have dared to write it."

John Craik laughed, and while he was laughing his eyes were grave and full of keen observation.

"Then you admit that it is true," he said.

"Yes," answered the Count; "it is true—all of it. The writer knows my country as few Englishmen—or *women* know it."

John Craik was leaning back in his deep chair, an emaciated, pain-stricken form. His calm gray eyes met the quick glance, and did not fall nor waver.

"Then you will not tell me?"

"No. But why are you so anxious to know?"

The Count smoked for a few seconds in silence.

"I will tell you," he said suddenly, "in confidence."

Craik nodded, and settled himself again in his chair. He was a very fidgety man.

"It is not the first article that I care about," explained De Lloseta. "It is that which is behind it. This"—he laid his hand on the page—"is my own country, the north and east of Spain, the wildest part of the Peninsula, the home of the Catalonians, who have always been the leaders in strife and warfare. It is the country from whence my family has its source. All that is written about Catalonia or the Baleares must necessarily refer in part to me and mine. This writer may know too much."

"I think," said John Craik, "that I can guarantee that if the writer does know too much, the *Commentator* shall not be the channel through which the knowledge will reach the public."

"Thanks, but—can you guarantee it? Can you

guarantee that the public interest being aroused by these articles may not ask for further details, which details might easily be given elsewhere, in something less—respectable—than the *Commentator?*"

"My dear sir, one would think you had a crime on your conscience."

Cipriani de Lloseta smiled—such a smile as John Craik had never seen before.

"I have many," he answered. "Who has not?"

"Yes; they accumulate as life goes on, do they not? But fortunately the conscience toughens in ratio to the strain put upon it."

"What I fear," went on De Lloseta, "is the idle gossip which obtains in England under the pleasant title of 'Society Notes,' 'Boudoir Chat,' and other new-fangled vulgarities. In Spain we have not that."

"Then Spain is the Promised Land."

"Your Society journalists may talk of the English nobility, though the aristocracy that fills the 'Society Notes' is almost invariably the aristocracy of yesterday. But I want to keep the Spanish families out of it if possible—the names that were there before printing was invented."

"Printing and education are too cheap nowadays," said John Craik. "They are both dangerous instruments in the hands of fools, and it is the fool who goes to the cheap market. But you need not be afraid of the Society papers. It is only those who wish to be advertised who find themselves there."

De Lloseta's thoughts had gone back to the *Commentator*. He picked up the magazine and was looking over the pages of the Spanish article.

"It is clever," he said. "It is very clever."

Craik nodded, after the manner of one who had formed his own opinion and intended to abide by it. He was a gentle-mannered man in the ordinary intercourse of life, but on the battle-field of letters he was a veritable Cœur-de-Lion. He quailed before no man.

"You know," said the Count, "there are only two persons who could have written this—and they are women. If it is the one, I fear nothing; if the other, I fear everything."

"Then," said John Craik, shuffling in his chair, "fear nothing."

De Lloseta looked at him sharply.

"I could force you to tell a lie by mentioning the name of the woman who wrote this," he said.

"Then don't!" said John Craik. "I lie beautifully!"

"No, I will not. But I will ask you to do something for me instead: let me read the proofs of these as they are printed."

For exactly two seconds John Craik pondered.

"I shall be happy to do that," he said. "I will let you know when the proof is ready. You must come here and read it in this room."

Cipriani de Lloseta rose from his seat.

"Thank you," he said, holding out his hand. "I will not keep you from your work. You are doing a better action than you are aware of."

He took the frail fingers in his grasp for a second and turned to go. Before the door closed behind him John Craik was at work again.

So Eve Challoner's work passed through Cipriani de Lloseta's hand, and that nobleman came into her life from another point. It would seem that in whichsoever direction she turned, the Majorcan was waiting for her with his grave persistence, his kindly determination to watch over her, to exercise that manly control over her life which is really the chief factor of feminine happiness on earth—if women only knew it. For all through Nature there are qualities given to the male for the sole advantage of the female, and the beasts of the forest rise up in silent protest against the nonsense that is talked to-day of woman's place in the world. We may consider the beasts of the field to advantage, for through all the chances and changes of education, of female emancipation, and the subjection of the weaker sort of man, there will continue to run to the end of time the one grand principle that the male is there to protect the female and the female to care for her young.

Cipriani de Lloseta thus late in life seemed to have found an object. Eve Challoner, while bringing back the past with a flood of recollections—for she seemed to carry the air of Majorca with her—had so far brought him to the present that for the first time since thirty years and more he began to be interested in the life that was around him.

He suspected—nay, he almost knew—that Eve had written the article in the *Commentator* which had attracted so much attention. John Craik had to a certain extent baffled him. He had called on the editor of the great periodical in the hope of gleaning some detail—some little scrap of information which would confirm his suspicion—but he had come away with nothing of value excepting the promise that the printed matter should pass through his hands before it reached the public.

Even if he was mistaken, and this proved after all to be the work of Mrs. Harrington, the fact of the proof being offered to his scrutiny was in itself an important safeguard. This, however, was only a secondary possibility. He knew that Eve had written this thing, and he wished to have the opportunity of correcting one or two small mistakes which he anticipated, and which he felt that he himself alone could rectify.

In the mean time John Craik was scribbling a letter to Eve in his minute caligraphy.

"DEAR MADAM" (he wrote),

"Your first article is, I am glad to say, attracting considerable attention. It is absolutely necessary that I should see you, with a view of laying down plans for further contributions. Please let me know how this can be arranged.

"Yours truly,

"JOHN CRAIK."

And at the same time another man, to whom all these things were of paramount importance—to whom all that touched Eve's life was as if it touched his own—was reading the *Commentator*. Fitz, on his way home from the Mediterranean to fill the post of navigating-lieutenant to a new ironclad at that time fitting out at Chatham, bought the *Commentator* from an enterprising newsagent given to maritime venture in Plymouth harbour. The big steamer only stayed long enough to discharge her mails, and Fitz being a sailor did not go ashore. Instead, he sat on a long chair on deck and read the *Commentator*. He naturally concluded that at last Cipriani de Lloseta had acceded to John Craik's wish.

The Ingham-Bakers had come home from Malta and were at this time staying with Mrs. Harrington in London. Agatha had of late taken to reading the newspapers somewhat exhaustively. She read such columns as are usually passed over by the majority of womankind—such as naval intelligence and those uninteresting details of maritime affairs printed in small type, and stated to emanate from Lloyd's, wherever that vague source may be.

From these neglected corners of the *Morning Post* Agatha Ingham-Baker had duly learnt that Henry Fitz-Henry had been appointed navigating-lieutenant to the *Terrific*, lying at Chatham, which would necessitate his leaving the *Kittiwake* at Gibraltar and returning to England at once. She also read that the Indian liner

Croonah had sailed from Malta for Gibraltar and London with two hundred and five passengers and twenty-six thousand pounds in specie.

And John Craik had written to Eve to come to London, where she had a permanent invitation to stay with Mrs. Harrington.

From over the wide world these people seemed to be drifting together like leaves upon a pond—borne hither and thither by some unseen current, swirled suddenly by a passing breath—at the mercy of wind and weather and chance, each occupied in his or her small daily life, looking no further ahead than the next day or the next week. And yet they were drifting surely and steadily towards each other, driven by the undercurrent of Fate, against which the strongest will may beat itself in vain.

CHAPTER IV

FOR THE HIGHEST BIDDER

"Let thine eyes look right on."

"How handsome Fitz looks in his uniform!" Mrs. Ingham-Baker said, with that touch of nervous apprehension which usually affected all original remarks addressed by her to Mrs. Harrington.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker had been to Malta and back, but the wonders of the deep had failed to make a wiser woman of her. If one wishes to gain anything by seeing the world, it is best to go and look at it early in life.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Harrington, with a glance in the direction of Agatha, the only other occupant of the drawing-room—"yes; he is a good-looking young fellow."

Agatha was reading the *Globe*, sitting upright and stiff, for she was wearing a new ball-dress.

"I think," went on Mrs. Ingham-Baker, volubly, "that I have never seen a naval uniform before—in a room close at hand, you know. Of course, on board the *Croonah* the officers wore a sort of uniform, but they had not a sword."

Agatha turned over her newspaper impatiently. Mrs. Harrington was listening with an air of the keenest interest, which might have been sarcastic.

"Poor Luke had not quite so much gold braid——"

Agatha looked up, and Mrs. Ingham-Baker collapsed.

"I should think," she added, after some nervous shufflings in her seat, "that a sword is a great nuisance. Should you not think so, Marian dear?"

"I do not know," replied Mrs. Harrington; "I never wore one."

Mrs. Ingham-Baker laughed eagerly at herself after the manner of persons who cannot afford to keep up a decent self-respect.

"But I always rather think," she went on, with an apprehensive glance towards her daughter, "that a sword is out of place in a drawing-room, or—or anywhere where there are carpets, you know."

"I thought you had never seen one before," put in Agatha, without looking up from her newspaper. "In a room—close at hand, you know."

"No—no, of course not; but I knew, dear, that they were worn. Of course, in warfare it is different."

"In warfare," said Mrs. Harrington, patiently, "they are usually supposed to come in rather handy."

"Yes—he—he!" acquiesced Mrs. Ingham-Baker, adjusting a bracelet on her arm with something approaching complacency. She thought she began to see daylight through the conversational maze in which—with the best intentions—she had involved herself.

"But I was only thinking that for a lady's drawing-room I think I like Luke's quiet black clothes just as much."

"I am glad of that," said Mrs. Harrington; "because I expect you will see several other men in the same dress this evening."

Mrs. Harrington had got up a party to go to the great naval ball of the season—a charity ball. Her party consisted of the Ingham-Bakers and the Fitz-Henrys, and for the first time for eight years the twin brothers met in the house in Grosvenor Gardens. They were at this moment in the dining-room together, where they had been left by their hostess with a kindly injunction to finish the port wine, duly tempered—as was all Mrs. Harrington's kindness—by instructions not to smoke.

Agatha's feelings were rather mixed, so, like a wise young woman of the world, she read the evening paper with great assiduity and refused to think. She was fully prepared for the battle, though the trumpet gave forth no certain sound. Her dress, she felt, was a great success. She knew that she was lither and straighter and more graceful than would be nine maidens out of every ten in the ball-room that evening. She was equipped for conquest, but she was not quite sure of her plan of campaign. The fair hair was coiffed to perfection, as the fashion paper hath it. Agatha Ingham-Baker was looking her best, and she knew it. Moreover, she had been brought up to consider looks first.

The evening had been one of comparisons. Fitz and

Luke had come together, for they were sharing rooms in Jermyn Street. Fitz, smart, upright, essentially a naval officer and an unquestionable gentleman. Luke, a trifle browner, more weather-beaten, with a faint, subtle suggestion of a rougher life. Fitz, easy, good-natured, calmly sure of himself—utterly without self-consciousness. Luke, conscious of inferior grade, not quite at ease, jealously on the alert for the comparison.

And Agatha had known from the first moment that in the eyes of the world—and Mrs. Harrington looked through those eyes—there was no comparison. Fitz carried all before him. All except Agatha. The girl was puzzled. Luke could not be compared with Fitz, and the whole world did not compare with Luke. She was fully awake to the contradiction, and she could not reconcile her facts. She had been very properly brought up at the Brighton Boarding School, receiving a good, practical, modern, nineteenth-century education—a curriculum of solid facts culled from the latest school books, from which Love had very properly been omitted.

And now, as she pretended to read the *Globe*, Agatha was puzzling vaguely and numbly over the contradictions that come into human existence with the small adjunct called love. She was wondering how it was that she saw Luke's faults and the thousand ways in which he was inferior to his brother, and yet that with all these to stay him up Fitz did not compare with Luke. After all, there must have been some small defect in the education which she had received, for instead of thinking these

futile things she ought to have been attempting to discover—as was her mother at that moment—which of the two brothers seemed more likely to inherit Mrs. Harrington's money.

Agatha's thoughts went back to the moment on the deck of the *Croonah*, when the sea breeze swept over her and Luke, and the strength of it, the simple, open force, seemed to be part and parcel of him—of the strong arms around her in which she was content to lie quiescent. She wondered for a moment whether it had all been true. She looked down at her perfect dress, at her bare arms, at the gleaming bracelets, and she failed to realize that she was the same woman.

For Agatha Ingham-Baker was essentially human and womanly, in that she was, and ever would be, a creature of possibilities. She took up her long gloves and began slowly to draw them on. They were quite new, and she smoothed them with a distinct satisfaction, under which there brooded the sense of a new possibility. In all her calculations of life—and these had been many—she had never thought of the possibility of misery. She buttoned the gloves, she drew them cunningly up over her rounded arms, and she wondered whether she was going to be a miserable woman all her life. She saw herself suddenly with those inward eyes which are sometimes vouchsafed to us momentarily, and she saw Misery—in its best dress.

She looked up as Fitz and Luke came into the room. Luke's eyes were only for her. Fitz, with the unconcealed absorption which was often his, absolutely ignored

her presence. And the little incident roused something contradictory in Agatha — something evil and, alas! feminine. She awoke to the very matter-of-factness of the present moment, and she determined to make a conquest of Fitz.

Agatha was not quite on her guard, and Mrs. Harrington's cold grey eyes were alert. It had once been this lady's intention to use Agatha as a means of subjecting Luke to her own capricious will—Agatha being the alternative means where money had failed. She had almost forgotten this when Luke came into the room with eyes only for Agatha—and the girl was looking at Fitz.

"I suppose, Agatha," said Mrs. Harrington, "you will not be at a loss for partners to-night. You will know plenty of dancing men."

"Oh, I suppose so," replied Agatha, indifferently. She turned over her newspaper and retreated, as it were, behind her first line of defence—the sure line of audacious silence.

"The usual throng?"

"The usual throng," answered Agatha, imperturbably.

Luke was biting his nails impatiently. His jealousy was patent to any woman. Fitz was talking to Mrs Ingham-Baker.

"I should advise you young men to secure your dances now," continued Mrs. Harrington with her usual fatal persistence. "Once Agatha gets into the room she will be snapped up."

Fitz turned round with his good-natured smile—the smile that indicates a polite attention to an indifferent conversation—and Mrs. Ingham-Baker was free to thrust in her awkward oar. She splashed in.

"Oh, I am sure she will not let herself be snapped up to-night; will you, dear?"

"That, no doubt, depends upon the snapper," put in Mrs. Harrington, looking—perhaps by accident—at Fitz. "Fitz," she went on, "come here and tell me all about your new ship. I hope you are proud—I am. I am often laughed at for a garrulous old woman when I begin talking of you!"

She glanced aside at Mrs. Ingham-Baker, who was beaming on Fitz, as the simple-hearted beam on the rising sun.

"Yes," said the stout lady, "we are all so delighted. Agatha was only saying yesterday that your success was wonderful. She was quite excited about it."

The fond mother looked invitingly towards her daughter with a smile that said as plainly as words—

"There you are! I have cleared the stage for you—step in and score a point."

But Agatha did not respond.

"I suppose it is a steamer," continued Mrs. Ingham-Baker, eagerly. "A steam man-of-war."

"Yes," replied Fitz, with perfect gravity; "a steam man-of-war."

"The *Horrible*—or the *Terrible*, is it not?"

"The *Terrific*."

There was an account of the new war-ship in the evening paper which Agatha had laid aside, and Fitz was impolitely glancing at this while he spoke. The journal gave the names of the officers. Fitz was wondering whether Eve Challoner ever saw *The Globe.*

Mrs. Ingham-Baker became lost in a maternal fit of admiration. She was looking at Agatha with her head on one side. At intervals she glanced towards Fitz—an inviting glance, as if to draw his attention to the fact that one of Nature's most perfect productions was waiting to gladden his vision.

"Look!" that little glance seemed to say. "Look at Agatha. *Is* she not lovely?"

But Fitz was still wondering whether Eve was in the habit of reading *The Globe.* He often wondered thus about her daily habits, trying to picture, in his ignorant masculine way, the hours and minutes of a girl's daily existence.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker could not stand this waste of his time and Agatha's dress.

"What do you think of the frock?" she asked Mrs. Harrington, in a whisper which was audible to every one in the room.

"It is very pretty," replied the hostess, who happened to be in a good humour. Dress possessed a small corner of her cold heart. It was one of very few weaknesses. It was almost a redeeming point in a too man-like character. Her own dresses were always perfect, usually

of the richest silk—and grey. Hence she was known as the Grey Lady, and only a few—for Society has neither time nor capacity for thought—wondered whether the colour had penetrated to her soul.

The two now became engaged in a technical conversation, which was only interrupted by the arrival of tea. Luke and Agatha were talking about Malta. She was telling him that their friends in Valetta had invited them to go again next year, and the *Croonah* was mentioned.

While the hostess was attending to the teapot, Mrs. Ingham-Baker took the opportunity of disturbing Fitz—of stirring him up, so to speak, and making him look at Agatha.

"Do you think you would have recognized your old playmate if you had met her accidentally—to-night, for instance, at the ball?" she asked.

Again the inviting glance toward her daughter, to which Fitz naturally responded. It was too obvious to ignore.

"No; I do not think so," he replied, going back in his mind to the recollection of a thin-legged little girl with lank hair.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker's proud eyes rested complacently on her offspring.

"Do you like her dress?" she asked in a whisper—only audible to him. But Agatha knew the gist of it. The arm and shoulder nearest to them gave a little jerk of self-consciousness.

"Very pretty," replied Fitz; and Mrs. Ingham-Baker stored the remark away for future use. For all she knew—or all she wanted to know—it might refer to Agatha's self.

"I am afraid I shall lose her, you know—horribly afraid," whispered Mrs. Ingham-Baker, knowing the value of competition in all things.

Fitz looked genuinely sympathetic, and glanced at Agatha again, wondering what disease had marked her for its own. Mrs. Ingham-Baker thought fit to explain indirectly, as was her wont.

"She is very much admired," she said under her breath, with a sigh and a lugubrious shake of the head.

"Oh," murmured Fitz, with a smile.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Ingham-Baker. She heaved a sigh, observed a decent pause, and then added, "Does it surprise you?"

"Not in the least. It is most natural."

"You think so—really?"

"Of course I do," answered Fitz.

There was another little pause, and Mrs. Ingham-Baker then said, in a tone of friendly confidence—

"I advise you to secure your dances early. She will be engaged three deep in a very short time—a lot of mere boys she does not want to dance with."

Fitz thanked her fervently, and went to help Mrs. Harrington.

Mrs. Ingham-Baker sat back in her chair, well pleased with herself. Like many of her kind, she began the

social campaign with the initial error of underrating her natural foes—young men. She set down all young men as fools, quite ignoring that these are usually better educated and have frequently seen more of the world than have elderly women.

CHAPTER V

THE TEAR ON THE SWORD

"But over all things brooding slept
The quiet sense of something lost."

AGATHA was singularly uncertain of herself. If it had not been for her education—at the Brighton school they had taught her that tears are not only idle, but also harmful to the complexion—she would have felt inclined to weep.

There was something wrong about the world this evening, and she did not know what it was. Little things irritated her—such as the creak of Mrs. Harrington's rich silk dress as that lady breathed. Agatha almost hated Fitz, without knowing why. She wanted Luke to come and speak to her, and yet the necessity for limiting their conversation to mere social platitudes made her hope that he would not do so.

At length she rose to go and make her last preparations for the ball. The old habit was so strong upon her that unconsciously she gave a little swing of the hips to throw her skirt out—to show herself to the greatest advantage in the perfect dress. There was a tiny suggestion of the

thoroughbred horse in the paddock—as there always is in the attitude of some young persons, though they would not be grateful were one to tell them of it—a certain bridling, a sleek step, and a lamentably obvious search for the eye of admiration. Fitz opened the door for her, and she gave him a glance as she passed him—a preliminary shot to find the range, as it were—to note which way the wind blew.

In the dimly-lighted hall Agatha suddenly became aware of a hot sensation in the eyelids. The temperature of the tear of vexation is a high one. As she passed towards the staircase, her glance was attracted by a sword, bright of hilt, dark of sheath. Fitz's sword, lying with his white gloves on the table, where he had laid them on coming into the house. The footman had drawn the blade an inch or so from the sheath—to look at the chasing—to handle the steel that deals in warfare with all the curiosity of one whose business lies among the knives of peace.

Agatha paused and looked at the tokens of Fitz's calling. She thought of Luke, who had no sword. And the hot unwonted tear fell on the blade.

All the evening Mrs. Harrington had been marked in her attention to Fitz. It was quite obvious that he was —for the moment, at all events—the favoured nephew. And Mrs. Ingham-Baker noted these things.

"My dear," she whispered to Agatha, when they were waiting in the hall for their hostess, "it is Fitz, of course. I can see that with half an eye."

Agatha shrugged her shoulders in a rude manner, suggesting almost that her mother was deprived of more reliable means of observation than the moiety mentioned.

"What is Fitz?" she asked, with weary patience.

"Well, I can only tell you that she has called him 'dear' twice this evening, and I have never heard her do the same to Luke."

"A lot Luke cares!" muttered Agatha, scornfully; and her mother, whose sense of logic did not run to the perception that Luke's feelings were beside the question, discreetly collapsed into her voluminous wraps.

She was, however, quite accustomed to be treated thus with contumely, and then later to see her suggestions acted upon—a feminine consolation which men would do well to take unto themselves. As soon as they entered the ball-room, Mrs. Ingham-Baker, with that supernatural perspicacity which is sometimes found in stupid mothers, saw that Agatha was refusing her usual partners. She noted her daughter's tactics with mingled awe and admiration, both of which tributes were certainly deserved. She saw Agatha look straight through one man at the decorations on the wall behind; she saw her greet an amorous youth of tender years with a semi-maternal air of protection which at once blighted his hopes, cured his passion, and made him abandon the craving for a dance. Agatha was evidently reserving herself and her programme for some special purposes, and she did it with a skill bred of long experience.

Luke was the first to come and ask for a dance—nay, he demanded it.

"Do you remember the last time we danced together?" he asked, as he wrote on her card.

"Yes," she replied, in a voice which committed her to nothing. She did not look at him, but past him, to where Fitz was talking to Mrs. Harrington.

But he was not content with that. He retained the card and stood in front of her, waiting with suppressed passion in his every muscle, waiting for her to meet his eyes.

At last, almost against her will, she did, and for one brief moment she was supremely happy. It was only, however, for a moment. Sent, apparently, by a very practical Providence to save her from herself, a young man blustered good-naturedly through the crowd and planted himself before her with a cheery *aplomb* which seemed to indicate his supposition that in bringing her his presence he brought the desire of her heart and the brightest moment of the evening.

"Well, Agatha," he said, in that loud voice which, with all due deference, usually marks the Harrovian. "How many have you got for me? No rot now! I want my share, you know, eh?"

Heedless of Luke's scowling presence, he held out his hand, encased in a very tight glove, asking with a good-natured jerk of the head for her programme.

"Is your wife here?" asked Agatha, smilingly relinquishing her card.

"Wife be blowed!" he answered heartily. "Why so formal? Of course she's here, carrying on with all the young 'uns as usual. She's as fit as paint. But she won't like to be called stiff names. Why don't you call her Maggie?"

Agatha smiled and did not explain. She doubtless had a good reason for the unusually formal inquiry, and she glanced at Luke to see that his brow had cleared.

Then suddenly some instinct, coming she knew not whence, and leading to consequences affecting their three lives, made her introduce the two men.

"Mr. Carr," she said, "Mr. Fitz-Henry. You may be able to get each other partners. Besides, you have an interest in common."

The two men bowed.

"Are you a sailor?" inquired Luke, almost pleasantly. With Willie Carr it was difficult to be stiff and formal.

"Not I; but I'm interested in shipping—not the navy, you know—merchant service. I'm something in the City, like the young man on the omnibus, eh?"

"I'm in the merchant service," answered Luke.

"Ah! What ship?"

"The *Croonah*."

"*Croonah*," repeated Carr, hastily scribbling his name on Agatha's programme. "Fine ship; I know her well by name. Know 'em all on paper, you know. I'm an insurance man—what they call a doctor—Lloyd's and all that; missing ships, overdue steamers, hedging and

dodging, and the inner walks of marine insurance—that's yours truly. *Croonah's* a big value, *I* know."

He looked up keenly over Agatha's engagement card. The look was not quite in keeping with his bluff and open manners. Moreover, a man who is, so to speak, not in keeping with himself is one who requires watching.

"Yes, she is a fine ship," answered Luke, with a momentary thought of the *Terrific*.

"Tell me," went on Carr, confidentially plucking Luke's sleeve, "when she is going to the bottom, and I'll do a line for you—make your fortune for you. You'd not be the first man who has come to me, with his hair hardly dry, for a cheque."

Luke laughed and went away in answer to Mrs. Harrington's beckoning finger.

Fitz was coming towards Agatha and her companion.

"Holloa!" exclaimed Carr, "I'm blowed if here is not a second edition of the same man."

"His brother," explained Agatha, who saw Fitz coming, although she was apparently looking the other way.

"Royal Navy," muttered Carr.

"Yes."

"Then I'm off. Can't get on with Royal Navy men, somehow."

With a jovial nod and something remarkably near a wink, Willie Carr left her, shouldering his way through the crowd with that good-natured boisterousness of

manner which is accepted by the world for the honesty that is supposed to lie behind it.

Agatha was looking the other way when Fitz came to her, and he was forced to touch her and repeat his desire to be accorded a dance before she became aware of his proximity.

"Certainly," she answered rather carelessly, "if you want one. I——"—she paused with infinite skill and looked down at her own dress—"I thought I had displeased you."

Fitz looked slightly surprised.

"What an absurd thing to think!" he said rather lamely.

She glanced up with pert coquetry.

"Then it was only oblivion, or indifference."

"What was only oblivion or indifference?" he asked, still smiling as he compared cards.

"Your very obvious delay in coming," she answered. "Considering that we have known each other since we were children, it is only natural that I should want to dance with you."

Now Henry Fitz-Henry—like others amongst us—was only human. Moreover, Agatha was pretty and trim, and, if the expression may pass, ship-shape. She made this remark with a perfect simplicity, which she perhaps was wise enough to try instead of more open coquetry. She was one of the dangerous young persons who succeed fairly well in being all things to all men up to a certain point. Fitz had taken two dances. He paused, pencil in hand.

"Considering that we have known each other since we were children," he said, repeating her words and tone, "may I have athird?"

"Yes," with a frank nod. "And"—she paused, and looking round saw Luke going away in the opposite direction with Mrs. Harrington—"and will you take me to have some coffee now. I am engaged for this dance, but no matter."

Fitz gave her his arm and turned to hitch his sword higher. He made sure that the blade was well home, shutting in the little red spot of gathering rust—a tear.

When they had at length passed through the eager crowd and found a resting-place in a smaller room, Agatha looked up at Fitz as he handed her her coffee, and did not pretend to hide the admiration with which she regarded him.

"You know," she said, "you are a great favourite with Mrs. Harrington."

"She is always very kind to me."

Fitz was a difficult person to gossip with by reason of his quiet directness of manner. He had a way of abruptly finishing his speech without the usual lowering of the voice. And it is just that small drop of half a tone that invites further confidence. In such small matters as these lies the secret of conversational success, and by such trivial tricks of the tongue we are daily and hourly deceived. The man or the woman who lowers the tone at the end of speech defers to the listener's opinion, and usually receives it. The manner with

which Fitz broke off led his listener to believe that he was not attending to the conversation. Agatha therefore baited her hook more heavily.

"Like many women, she thinks that sailors are superior to the rest of mankind," she said, with just enough lightness of tone to be converted into a screen if necessary. But she heaved a little sigh before she drank her coffee.

Fitz had not decided whether all this referred to himself or to Luke. He hoped that Agatha had, so to speak, brought her guns to bear upon him, because of himself he was sure, of Luke he was doubtful. As a matter of curiosity he pursued the conversation.

"And you," he said, "look upon such mistaken persons with the mingled pity and contempt that they deserve?"

"No," she answered with audacious calmness, as she rose and passed before him; "for I think the same."

She cleverly deprived him of the opportunity of answering, and pushed her way through the crowd alone, allowing him to follow.

Before she danced with him again, she danced with Luke, and her humour seemed to have undergone a change.

There are some men who, like salmon, never go back. They push on, and that which they have gained they hold to though it cost them their lives. Luke Fitz-Henry was one of these, and Agatha found that in the London ball-room she could take back nothing that she

had given on board the *Croonah*. Luke, it is to be presumed, had old-fashioned theories which have fallen into disuse in these practical modern days wherein we flirt for one night only, for a day, for a week, according to convenience. He could not lay aside the voyage to Malta and that which occurred then as a matter of the past; and Agatha, surprised and at a loss, did not seem to know how to make him do so.

She learnt with a new wonder that the rest of this ball—namely, that part of his programme which did not refer to her, the dances he was to dance with partners other than herself—counted as nothing. For him this ball was merely herself. There was not another woman in the room—for him. He told her this and other things. Moreover, the sound of it was quite new to her. For the modern young man does not make serious love to such women as Agatha Ingham-Baker. This must be recorded to his credit. He has not much on that side of his ledger, poor fellow! And no doubt some who know him will be ready to discount it by suggesting that he is incapable of seriously loving any one—except himself.

CHAPTER VI

THE COUNT STANDS BY

"La discretion d'un homme est d'autant plus grande qu'on lui demande davantage."

"I WANT you to ask me to dinner!"

The Count de Lloseta bowed as he made this remark, and looked at his companion with a smile.

At times Mrs. Harrington gave way to a momentary panic in respect to Cipriani de Lloseta—when she was not feeling very well, perhaps. Her situation seemed to be somewhat that of a commander holding an impregnable position against a cunning foe. For every position of such a nature is impenetrable only so long as it can meet and defy each new engine of warfare that is brought against it. And one day the fatal engine is invented.

Mrs. Harrington looked into his face with a flicker in her drawn grey eyes. Then she gave a little laugh which was not quite free from uneasiness.

"Why?" she asked sardonically. "Have you fallen in love with some one at last?"

She knew that this taunt would hurt him. Besides,

she liked to throw it at the memory of a woman whom she had hated—Cipriani de Lloseta's dead wife.

"I should like to be of your party to-night," he said quietly.

She gave another scornful laugh, with that ring of malice in it which thrills in the voice of some elderly women when they speak of young girls.

"Eve is to be of our party to-night," she said. "Ah—that would be too absurd—a new Adam! You! But, mind you, Agatha will be here too. You will have to be careful how you play your cards, Don Juan! However, we dine at eight, and I shall be glad to see you."

De Lloseta took up his hat and stick. With Mrs. Harrington, and with no one else perhaps in London, he still observed the stiff Spanish manner. He bowed without offering to shake hands, and left her.

Mrs. Harrington—cold, calculating, essentially worldly—looked at the closed door with deep speculation in her eyes. They were hard eyes, such as are only to be seen in a woman's face; for an old man has usually picked up a little charity somewhere on the road through life.

Then she looked at a hundred-pound note which he had tossed across the table to her with a silent Catalonian contempt earlier in the proceedings.

"I thought he was rather easy to manage," she said, examining the note. "I thought he wanted something. He has paid this—for his dinner."

The Count moreover appeared to consider the entertainment cheap at the price, if his manner was to be relied upon. For he entered the drawing-room at eight o'clock the same evening with an unusually pleasant air of anticipatory enjoyment. He shook hands quite gaily with Mrs. Ingham-Baker, who bridled stoutly, and thought that he was a very distinguished-looking man despite his dark airs. He received Agatha's careless nod and shake of the hand with a murmured politeness; with Eve he shook hands in silence. Then he turned rather suddenly upon Fitz and held out his hand gravely.

"I congratulate you," he said. "When I last had the pleasure of seeing you, I did not suspect that I was entertaining a great man unawares—you were too humble."

Fitz involuntarily glanced towards Eve, knowing that the speaker had a second meaning. Eve was watching the Count rather curiously, as if wondering how he would greet Fitz. Every one in the room was looking at the Count de Lloseta; for this quiet-spoken Spaniard was a distinct factor in the life of each one of them.

They fell to talking of commonplace matters, and presently Mrs. Harrington rustled in. The servants were only awaiting her arrival to announce that dinner was ready.

She looked round.

"We are short of men," she said. "We miss Luke, do we not?"

She looked straight at Agatha, who returned her stare with audacious imperturbability. It was only Luke's presence that unsteadied her. When he was away, she could hold her own against the world.

"I have never seen Luke," said Eve to the Count, who had been commanded to offer her his arm. "I am so sorry to have missed him."

Agatha, who was in front, beneath them on the stairs, turned and looked up at her with a strange smile. She either did not heed the Count, or she undervalued his powers of observation.

"You would undoubtedly have liked him," said the Spaniard.

At the table there was considerable arranging of the seats, and finally De Lloseta was placed at one side with Mrs. Ingham-Baker, while the two girls sat side by side opposite to them.

Fitz was at the foot of the table.

In the course of conversation the Spaniard leant across and said to Agatha—

"Have you seen this month's *Commentator*, Miss Ingham-Baker?"

An unaccountable silence fell upon the assembled guests. Eve Challoner's face turned quite white. Her eyes were lowered to her plate. No one looked at her except the Count, and his glance was momentary.

"Yes—and of course I have read the Spanish sketch. I suppose every one in London has! It makes me want to go to Spain."

Mrs. Ingham-Baker bridled and glanced at the Spaniard. Agatha might be a countess yet—a foreign one, but still a countess. Fitz was looking at De Lloseta. He naturally concluded that it was he who had written the article. He was still watching his face when the Spaniard turned to him and said—

"And you, Fitz? You know something about the matter too!"

And Eve Challoner betrayed herself completely. No one happened to be looking at her except Cipriani de Lloseta, and he saw that not only had she written the celebrated articles, but that she loved Fitz. Fitz's opinion was the only one worth hearing. In her anxiety to hear it, she quite forgot to guard her secret.

"Yes," answered Fitz, wondering what De Lloseta was leading up to. "I have read them both, of course. I hope there are more. They are splendidly written, and the man knows what he is writing about."

"He does," said the Count, smiling across the table at Eve.

The girl was moistening her lips, which seemed suddenly to have become dry and feverish. Her hands were trembling. She had evidently been terribly afraid of the opinion so innocently asked by the Spaniard.

De Lloseta changed the subject at once. He had found out all that he wanted to know and more. He had no intention of forcing a confidence upon Eve. Such would not have suited his plans at all.

The burthen of the conversation fell upon his shoulders. Fitz, no great talker at any time, was markedly quiet. He had nothing to offer for the general delectation. His remarks upon all subjects mooted were laconic and valueless. The duties as temporary host occupied him for the moment, and his thoughts were obviously elsewhere. His attitude towards Eve had been friendly, but rather reserved. There was no suggestion of sulkiness, but on the other hand he had failed to take advantage of one or two opportunities which she had given him of referring to the past and to any mutual obligations or common interests they had had therein. It happened that Agatha had heard her give him these openings, and had noticed his lack of enterprise..

Agatha Ingham-Baker had long before conceived a strange suspicion—namely, that Eve and Fitz loved each other. She had absolutely nothing to base her suspicions upon, not so much even as the gossips of Majorca. And nevertheless her suspicions throve, as such do, and grew into a conviction. Luke was away. He was safe from the glamour of Eve's dark eyes, so Agatha could give her whole attention to punishing Eve for the possession of those same eyes, coupled with a tall and stately form, a wonder of soft black hair, and such a vague and indefinite lovableness as earns for some women the hatred of their sisters.

Agatha had come down early to the drawing-room on purpose to establish her right over Fitz. She found De Lloseta in the hall, and he followed her into the room.

Whenever she attempted to demonstrate her right to the attention of the only young man present by one of those little glances or words with which women hurt each other, De Lloseta seemed to step in, intercepting with his dark smile. At dinner when Fitz was absent-minded, Agatha managed to show the others that she alone could follow him into the land of his reflections and call him back from thence. But on several occasions when she was about to turn to him with a smile which was specially reserved for certain young men under certain circumstances, Cipriani de Lloseta spoke to her and spoilt the small manœuvre.

Eve saw it all. She saw more than the acute Spaniard. Firstly, because she was a woman. Secondly, because she loved Fitz. Thirdly, because the inken curse was hers in a small degree, and people who dabble in ink often wade deep into human nature.

Through the dreary length of that dinner Eve and Fitz held to their doctrine of reserve; she, because the remembrance of her own simplicity at D'Erraha still had the power to bring a warm feeling of shame to her cheek. She had slipped into the maidenly error of exaggerating her childish forwardness. She almost persuaded herself that she had told Fitz of her love—a poor little girlish love, which was long left behind. He stood aloof because she was different; because she obviously held him at arm's length, evidently intending him to understand that their old relationship of the Val d'Erraha did not hold good in London.

And after all a little passing incident spoilt the effect, as little incidents do spoil the effect of our lives. It was a question of olives. Mrs. Harrington had gathered some local customs from different parts of the world, and some she retained. There was a small dish of olives in front of each guest, and the Count gave full appreciation to his. Fitz, on the contrary, being a person of healthy and indiscriminate appetite, neglected the fruit.

"Are you not eating your olives?" said Mrs. Harrington. "Perhaps they are not nice. I do not pretend that they are as good as those you are accustomed to. Not *aceite de Mallorca*."

Fitz laughed at the familiar words and helped himself; and while he was doing so, Cipriani de Lloseta said quietly in the Majorcan dialect—

"The world has no olives like those of the Val d'Erraha."

Fitz and Eve, at the sound of the well-known, half-Moorish accents, raised their eyes and looked at each other.

Later on, when the two gentlemen went up to the drawing-room, De Lloseta apologized for it.

"I am sorry," he said to Eve, standing beside her at the piano, "that I made that blunder at dinner."

And yet his manner was not that of a man conscious of having made a stupid mistake.

"What blunder?" asked Eve.

"My mention of D'Erraha. I ought to have remembered that it could only give you pain. I am sorry, Eve."

"Please do not say that. I like to hear the name. I like to talk of it with those who know. There are so few."

She was turning over the music. He rubbed his instrument lovingly with a silk pocket-handkerchief round the bridge, where the resin had fallen.

"It is strange," he said, with a short laugh, "a little island, how it winds itself round the practical nineteenth-century heart. Do you find it so?"

"Yes," answered Eve.

She glanced through the folding doors to the larger drawing-room, where Fitz was talking to Agatha. He did not appear to be paying much attention to the conversation, for Agatha was laughing at what she was saying, and Fitz was quite grave.

"Yes," pursued De Lloseta in his quiet voice, "there are not many people who know D'Erraha—not many people in the world."

Eve glanced at him. He was looking at Fitz.

"And none who think of it as you and I do," said Eve.

De Lloseta continued to look at Fitz, and perhaps his deep eyes saw through the young sailor's iron self-control. He made no answer, while Eve set the music in order on the piano, and sat down to play his accompaniment.

Fitz was forcing himself to listen to Agatha's platitudes, platitudes spiced with that salt of audacity and *double-entente* for which his mental palate had no zest.

"One can never tell," said De Lloseta, half to himself.

Eve, with her fingers resting on the keys, looked up in surprise.

"One can never tell what?"

"What people may think. And it is better so—especially for men. We could not afford to let women know what we may be thinking of them—or of other women."

He broke off with a little laugh, and Eve found herself wondering what sort of man the real Cipriani de Lloseta was.

"I was thinking of the *Terrific*," he said, in a lighter, explanatory tone, as he drew the candles nearer to the music. "I know nothing about war-ships, but I know a little of men. I should like to see England engaged in a great naval war. I should like to watch the career of the *Terrific*. For I think our friend in the next room is a born commander of men."

"Why?" asked Eve, sharply, almost as if she resented something that he had said.

The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders.

"Because the commander's thoughts must be behind a closed door."

He set the violin beneath his pointed chin and waited with raised bow.

"But there is no danger—no probability of a great naval war?" she asked.

He glanced down at her face, which was singularly colourless.

"Oh no!" he answered; and the music covered his voice.

CHAPTER VII

CROSS PURPOSES

"Speech is but broken light on the depth of the unspoken."

HUMAN nature is very self-deceptive. We all succeed in persuading ourselves that the little failing we cannot even to ourselves deny is after all only a sign of pleasant humanity and nature. If we be short we consider that big men are apathetic and dull in the society of ladies —men of no mind or charm of manner. If Nature fashioned us on a large pattern we despise whipper-snappers.

Agatha Ingham-Baker admired her own hair. She knew that other girls had golden hair, but that she considered verging on the vulgar. Others, again, had locks which, like Eve's, would shame the raven's wing. Bah! Niggerish and dull. Snake-coloured hair was therefore the thing.

Secure on this hypothesis Agatha therefore made a practice of dropping into the bedrooms of her young friends to brush her hair after the day's campaign was over. If her young friends noted the silken length of

the tresses and were consumed with envy—well, it could not be helped.

Agatha rather liked Eve, chiefly perhaps because she was not afraid of her. Eve, be it understood, in comparison to Agatha Ingham-Baker was as simple as a milkmaid. In those matters of feminine knowledge of men as understood socially, and of society as understood by those who compose it, Eve's knowledge was absolutely *nil*, whereas Agatha was deeply versed. Hers was that complacent and imperturbable knowledge of the world which lends an air of aggressive self-complacency to maidens and usually leaves them lingering, but self-complacent still, upon the matrimonial shelf.

Agatha was a person of strong opinions, but they were not her own. She was one of the thousands of young women who wear a thing "because it is worn," who do a thing "because it is done," and who leave undone that which is "not done." Who sets the lead they do not know; who wears first or does first they do not care. Not only do they subject their outer persons to this inexorable code of laws, but also their thoughts and tastes. Agatha Ingham-Baker was a walking, moving, breathing illustration of that wide-reaching terror—the Lady's Newspaper.

She got into fashionable clothes in the morning, and at eventide there was no rest. She brushed her hair in a garment described in the columns of her *vade mecum* as a "cosy dressing wrap."

Eve answered her knock by an invitation to come in, thinking that it was probably Mrs. Harrington's maid, and the cosy dressing wrap rather took away her breath, thereby fulfilling one of its missions.

In one glance Agatha saw that Eve had no cosy dressing wrap, and that her hair was a marvel.

"May I come in?" she said sweetly. "My hair takes such a time to brush, and I hate being alone."

"Certainly," said Eve, still rather surprised, for Agatha had scarcely spoken to her. "Wait a minute; I will draw this chair up."

"Thanks!"

Agatha sat down slowly, giving the cosy dressing wrap and the long hair a full opportunity. She stretched out two tiny slippers towards the fender, and glanced round at Eve's dressing-gown.

"I hate dinner-parties," she said; "they bore me horribly!"

Eve came towards the fire, brush in hand; her hair hung over her shoulders like a dusky sable cloak. Agatha was conscious of it, and stared at the fire.

"They might bore me if I had many of them," said Eve. "But I have never had the chance."

Agatha smiled a little commiserating smile.

"How strange," she said. "Mrs. Harrington has often spoken of you and of Majorca. I think I should have committed suicide if I had lived there!"

"Why?" said Eve, simply.

"Oh! I should have been so bored."

It happened that this verb passive was in fashionable use at the time, and Agatha always used the latest words, applied in the latest manner. Eve had scarcely heard the expression ; she certainly had been spared experience of its deepest meaning.

"Of course it was a very quiet life," she answered.

"Not to say dead-alive," suggested Agatha, with her little high-pitched society laugh.

Eve made no answer ; she was moving about the room putting things tidy. Agatha took the opportunity of looking round, noting a thousand little things which caused her some surprise—all the things by which girls judge each other, while poor blind men know nothing of them. We do not know the difference between the girl who dresses for herself and her who dresses for the world. Agatha Ingham-Baker looked round, and she was rather glad that she had not asked Eve to come to her room. The rest of her personalities were not in keeping with the cosy dressing wrap. Mr. Challoner had always lived among the refined and the luxurious. With Eve he had been lavish, and the habits of childhood and maidenhood usually cling to a woman through life. At the Casa d'Erraha she had been a sort of young princess, and the habits of personal refinement are very tenacious.

"But then, of course, you had Fitz," said Agatha, with that excess of feminine guilelessness which rarely deceives.

Eve paused in her occupation ; she was at the dressing-table. She looked up at the reflection of her own face

in the mirror, and she knew that she had no fear of Agatha Ingham-Baker.

"He was in Minorca," she said quietly, "and D'Erraha is in Majorca."

Agatha leant rather far back in order to look over her shoulder. She was proud of her litheness, and for a moment she forgot that only a girl was looking at her.

"Are they far apart?" she inquired in the preoccupied tone of a maiden mindful of her pose.

"Twelve hours by steamer," replied Eve, truthfully.

Agatha brushed her hair for some seconds in silence, passing down the length of the tresses with a certain enjoyment.

"It must have been a great alleviation for you to have him—even at that distance. He is very handsome. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," answered Eve, imperturbably, "I do."

Agatha gave a little laugh—which was in itself an insult. Eve was standing behind her, looking down at the steady white hand that held the brush.

"Is he handsomer than Luke?" she asked quietly.

The hand shook, and Eve was looking at it. Her woman's—perhaps her writer's—instinct told her to look not at the whole woman, but at one part of her, her hands or her lips. The hand betrayed Agatha.

"Yes," she answered, with the impulse of cunning which prompts the contradiction in speech to the thought that is in the mind, "I think he is."

Eve said nothing, and Agatha proceeded to spoil matters, as women will, by over-volubility.

"He is different—quite," she said; "although he is clean-shaven and he has the same profile. I do not understand them. They are quite different from—the men one meets. Are they not? They are merely sailors, after all; they have no title, and no hope of one; no prospects, no—money. And yet——"

She paused, and there was only the smooth sound of the brush over her hair. "And yet——" Eve was thinking that too. "And yet." Women's words, a woman's reason. But if women were to live and love by logic, where would some of us be, my masters?

Eve looked down from her superior height on Agatha, and felt a little self-reproachful. She felt that she had judged too hastily. Agatha was perhaps nicer—a better woman—than her manner would lead the observer to believe. For Eve was nothing if not charitable. She was young enough to believe in the vague Good that lurketh behind Evil.

Agatha did not remain long silent. It was, after all, only that little possibility in her which sometimes pushed its way up to the surface, refusing to be held under control.

"Unless Mrs. Harrington leaves them her money," she said musingly.

Eve was rather startled. Prepared to gather a fig, she had found a thistle.

Agatha went on. Like all cunning people, she

completely misread simplicity. She did not know that the deepest minds are the simplest.

"Has she ever said anything to you?" she asked.

"About what?"

Eve had sat down in a low chair at the opposite corner of the fireplace. She looked across, and the firelight flickered in the depths of her dark eyes. Agatha shrugged her shoulders. This girl was almost too easy to manage—hardly worthy of her social steel.

"About her money—to whom she intends to leave it?"

"Oh no!" replied Eve, not noticing the hard look in Agatha's eyes. "Why should she?"

"I don't know. I thought she might. She seems so devoted to you."

Agatha waited for Eve to say that she did not take the least interest in the matter, and the fact that she omitted to do so was rather disturbing. Agatha had been splendidly educated, and she was an apt pupil. Even her cunning was conventional. It was the ordinary cunning of those women of the world, of whom she was a fair type. It ran in certain grooves, and a man of experience could have foretold its every turn and twist. For women are really no match for men in any intellectual trial.

"Of course," she said, "it is a matter of the utmost indifference to me. But I must confess that Mrs. Harrington interests me. She is so singular. She is so independent, and so very peculiar in her likes and dislikes. You know she once told mother that she intended

to leave all her money to one of them, but she did not mention which. Of course she did not say so in so many words, but mother understood her to mean that. You know"—she paused, and studied the interwoven initials engraved on the back of her brush—"you know mother is not such a stupid as she pretends to be."

There was a pause.

"I am sure she prefers Fitz," Agatha went on, heedless of the simple truth that she who speaks the most necessarily tells the most.

"She seems fond of him," put in Eve, quietly.

"But, on the other hand, she undoubtedly spoilt Luke's career by her hastiness of temper years ago, and she may feel that she owes him some reparation. Mother says that she has almost said so to her."

"I hope she will make him some reparation," said Eve; and Agatha glanced at her sceptically. She did not believe it, of course. She suspected Eve of loving Fitz, and therefore of desiring that Mrs. Harrington should leave her money to him. It was either that, she reflected, or else Eve knew for certain that Fitz was to inherit the fortune, and therefore intended to marry him. Her education and experience pointed alike to the latter hypothesis as more natural.

"She is fond of them both in her way," she went on, conversationally. "She is rather weak where sailors are concerned. I wonder why, by the way, but she is afraid of Fitz?"

She looked closely at Eve as she spoke, but Eve's head happened to be turned to one side.

"He could twist her round his little finger if he only took the trouble."

Even the astute may make mistakes. Agatha would have done better to have waited a few moments until Eve's face was turned towards her. As it was, Agatha saw nothing.

She rose and gave a lady-like little yawn, which was perhaps not quite genuine. A yawn being deemed a sign of innocence and ingenuousness in the school to which Agatha belonged.

"I was wondering whether he had ever said anything to you about it?"

"Never."

"Perhaps, you know, Mrs. Harrington has told him what she intends to do with her money."

"Possibly!"

Eve had risen also, and did not seem very anxious to prolong the conversation.

Agatha began collecting her belongings.

"Well, I must depart," she said lightly. "I am half asleep already." Which was not the truth, for she was very wide awake. "Good night," she said. "Thanks for letting me sit by your fire. Mine is such a dull one. Is there anything I can do for you? No! You have everything you want? It is not a bad house to stay in, is it? Good night. Pleasant dreams."

With a nod and a pert smile she disappeared in the darkness of the passage.

Eve closed the door and came back to the fire. She stood on the hearthrug and looked into the glowing cinders. She knew that Agatha loved Luke, but that she intended to marry Fitz, should Mrs. Harrington's money come to him. The only thing that she did not understand was Agatha's motive. She could not understand that a woman should unhesitatingly make riches the sole aim and object of her existence. Some women are so! And the world may well be thankful that their comprehension is limited.

CHAPTER VIII

A VOYAGE

"And hence one master passion in the breast,
Like Aaron's serpent, swallows all the rest."

LIFE is, after all, a matter of habit. In those families where rapid consumption is hereditary, the succeeding generations seem to get into the habit of dying early. They take it, without complaint, as a matter of course. Sailors and other persons who lead a rough and hazardous life seem also to acquire this philosophy of existence. Luke FitzHenry went to sea again on the day appointed for the *Croonah* to leave London, without so much as a snarl at Fate.

It was a great wrench to him to leave Agatha again so soon, in the first full force of his passion. But he left her almost happily. His love for her was rising up and filling his whole existence. And it is not those lives that are frittered away in a thousand pastimes that are happy. It is the strong life wholly absorbed by one great interest, be it love or be it merely money-making.

Luke had hitherto been rather an aimless man. He

was a brilliant sailor, not because he set himself to the task, but merely because seamanship was born in him, together with a dogged steadiness of nerve and a complete fearlessness. It was so easy to be a good sailor that he had not even the satisfaction of having to make an effort. His heart was empty. He had indeed the sea, but his love of it was unconscious. Away from it, he was ill at ease; on its breast, he was not actively happy—he was merely at home. But he had no career. He had no great prize to aim for, and his combative nature required one. He had no career to make, for he was already near the summit of the humble ladder on which Fate had set his feet.

Then came Agatha, and the empty heart was filled with a dangerous suddenness.

The pain which this parting caused him had something of pleasure in it. There are some men and many women who doubt love unless it bring actual pain with it. Luke had always mistrusted fate, and had love brought happiness with it he would probably have doubted its genuineness. He hugged all his doubts, his jealousies, his passionate thoughts to himself. He had nothing to cling to. Agatha had never told him that she loved him. But she was for him so entirely apart from all other women that it seemed necessary that he also should not be as other men for her Not much for a lover to live upon during four or five months!

Agatha had given him a photograph of herself—a fashionable picture in an affected pose in evening dress

—but she had absolutely refused to write. This photograph Luke put into a frame, and as soon as the *Croonah* was out of dock he hung it up in his little cabin. His servant saw it and recognized the fair passenger of a former voyage, but he knew his place and his master too well to offer any comment.

Unlike the ordinary young man, whose thoughts are lightly turned to love, Luke was no worse a sailor for his self-absorption. All his care, all his keen, fearless judgment were required; for the *Croonah* ran through a misty channel into a boisterous Atlantic.

He stood motionless at his post, as was his wont, keen and alert for the moment, but living in the past. He saw again Mrs. Harrington's drawing-room as he had last seen it, with Agatha sitting in a low chair near the fire, while Mrs. Harrington wrote at her desk, and Mrs. Ingham-Baker read the *Times*.

"I have come," he remembered saying, "to bid you good-bye."

He heard again the rustle of Mrs. Ingham-Baker's newspaper, and again he saw the look in Agatha's eyes as they met his. He would remember that look to the end of his life; he was living on it now. Agatha, in her rather high-pitched society tones, was the first to speak.

"If I were a sailor," she said, "I would never say good-bye. It is better to drop in and pay a call; at the end one might casually mention the words."

"Oh! we get accustomed to it," Luke answered.

"Do you?" the girl inquired, with an enigmatical

smile, and her answer was in his eyes. She did not want him to get accustomed to saying farewell to her.

Luke FitzHenry was not inclined to sociability—the stronger sort of man rarely is. On board the *Croonah* he was usually considered morose and self-absorbed. He did his duty, and in this was second to no man on board; but he was content to get the passengers to their destination, looking upon the *Croonah* as a mere conveyance for a certain tally of chattering, gossiping, mischief-making live-stock. He utterly failed in his social duties; he did not cultivate the art of making his ship a sort of floating "hydro."

The boisterous weather kept the decks fairly select until Gibraltar had been left behind in the luminous haze that hangs over the mouth of the Mediterranean in a westerly breeze. But in the smoother waters of the Southern seas the passengers plucked up courage, and one morning at breakfast Luke perceived a tall, heavy-shouldered man nodding vigorously, and wiping his mouth with a napkin, which he subsequently waved with friendly jocularity.

"Morning—morning!" he cried.

"Good morning," replied Luke, passing to his seat at the after-end of the saloon. He had recognized the man at once, although he had only exchanged a few words with him in a crowded ball-room. Everything connected with Agatha, however remotely, seemed to engrave itself indelibly on his mind. This was Willie Carr, the man to whom Agatha had introduced him at

the naval orphanage ball. Willie Carr was on board the *Croonah*, evidently quite at home, and bound for India, for he was seated at the Indian table.

It was not necessary for Luke to make inquiries about this passenger, because his brother officers soon began to speak of him. By some means Carr made himself popular among the officers, and gradually began to enjoy privileges denied to his fellow-passengers. He frequently visited the engine-room, and was always to be seen after meals in, or in the neighbourhood of, the smoking-room, in conversation with one or other of the *Croonah's* officers, who were generally found to be smoking Carr's cigars.

Despite many obvious and rather noisy overtures of friendship, Luke FitzHenry held aloof until the Aden light was left behind. He succeeded in limiting his intercourse to an exchange of passing remarks on the weather until the *Croonah* had rounded Pointe de Galle and was once more heading northwards. Then arose circumstances which brought them together, and possibly served Willie Carr's deliberate purpose.

Carr was travelling without his wife—he was the sort of man who does travel without his wife. She, poor woman, had made one initial mistake, namely, in marrying him, and such mistakes are sometimes paid for by a life of atonement to the gods. She remained at home to care for an ever-increasing family on a small housekeeping allowance, which was not always paid.

This wife was the only point in his favour which had

presented itself to Luke's mind, for the latter resented a certain tone of easy familiarity, which Agatha seemed to take as a matter of course.

Luke was afraid of being questioned about Agatha, and he therefore kept Carr at a respectful distance. He harboured no personal dislike towards the man, whose bluff and honest manner made him popular among his fellows.

It was the evening of the first day in the Bay of Bengal that a steamer passed the *Croonah*, running south, and flying a string of signals. The *Croonah* replied, and the homeward-bound vessel disappeared in the gathering twilight with her code flags still flying.

"What did she say?" asked the passengers.

"Nothing," replied the officers; "only the weather. It is the change of the monsoon."

At dinner the captain was remarkably grave; he left the table early, having eaten little. The officers were reticent, as was their wont. Luke FitzHenry, it was remarked and remembered afterwards, alone appeared to be in good spirits.

After dinner a busybody in the shape of a too-intelligent young coffee-planter, who possessed an aneroid barometer, brought that instrument to the smoking-room with a scared face. The needle was deflected to a part of the dial which the intelligent young planter had hitherto considered to be merely ornamental and not intended for practical use. His elders and betters told him to put it away and not to tell the ladies. Then

they continued smoking; but they knew that they had just seen such a barometer as few men care to look upon.

The word "cyclone" was whispered in one corner of the cabin, and a white-moustached general was understood to mutter—

"Damned young fool!" as he pulled at his cheroot.

The whisperer did not hear the remark, and went on to give further information on atmospheric disturbances. Suddenly the field-officer jumped to his feet.

"Look here, sir!" he cried. "If we are in for a cyclone, I trust that we know how to behave as men—and die as men, if need be! But don't let us have any whispering in corners, like a lot of schoolgirls. We are in the care of good men, and all we have to do is to obey orders, and—damn it, sir!—to remember we're Englishmen!"

The General walked out of the smoking saloon, and the first sight that greeted his eyes was Luke FitzHenry, quick, keen, and supernaturally calm, standing over a group of Malay sailors who were hard at work getting in awnings. The white-haired soldier stood and watched with the grim silence which he had showed to death before now. He was of the Indian army. He had led the black man to victory and death, and he knew to a nerve the sensitive Asiatic organization. He saw that it was good; and not for the first time he noted the sheep-like dependence with which the black men grouped themselves round their white leader, watching his face,

taking their cue in expression, in attitude, even in their feelings from him.

"Good man," muttered the General to himself.

He stood there alone while the ship was stripped of every awning, while the decks were cleared of all that hamper which makes the passenger an encumbrance at sea. There was no shouting, no confusion, no sign of fear. In a marvellously short time the broad decks were lying bare and clear, all loose things were stowed away or made fast, and the *Croonah* stood ready for her great fight.

All the while an arc of black cloud had been growing on the horizon. There was not a breath of wind. From the engine-rooms the thud of the piston-rods came throbbing up with a singular distinctness. The arc of cloud had risen halfway to the meridian. There were streaks in it—streaks of yellow on black. Far away to the north, at the point of contact with the horizon, a single water-spout rose like a black pillar from sea to cloud. Dwellers in the cool and temperate zones would have thought that the end of the world was about to come. Men, standing quite still, felt the drops of perspiration trickling beneath their ears. The air taken into the lungs seemed powerless to expand them. The desire to take a deeper breath was constant and oppressive.

A quartermaster brought a message to the General that he must go below or else come up to the lower bridge. He could not stay where he was. The Captain said that

the cyclone might break at any moment. The old soldier nodded, and made his way to the lower bridge. Before he had been there long he was joined by Carr, who carried a mackintosh over his arm. The two men nodded. The General rather liked Carr. He was a Harrovian, and the General's son was at Harrow.

"Going to see it out on deck?" he inquired.

"Rather. I'm not going to be drowned like a rat in a trap!" replied Carr, jovial still, and brave.

Luke came to the bridge and took up his position by the side of the Captain. No one spoke.

From the distant horizon—from the North where the waterspout still was—a long groan floated over the water. There was a green line on the black surface of the ocean, dark green flecked with white; it was spreading over the sea, and coming towards them. Luke turned and said one word to the quartermaster. The man went to the wheelhouse and brought out three long black oilskin coats—two for the Captain and Luke, the other for himself.

The groan, like that of an animal in pain, was repeated. It seemed farther off. Then a sound like the escape of steam from an engine came apparently from the sky.

Luke said something to the Captain, and pointed with his right hand. They consulted together in a whisper, and the Captain made a signal to the two steersmen motionless in the wheelhouse. The well-greased chains ran smoothly, and the great black prow of the *Croonah*

crept slowly round the horizon pointing out to sea, away from the land. Ceylon lay astern of them in the darkness which was almost like night.

The Captain and Luke stood side by side on the little bridge, far above the deck. They had exchanged their gold-braided caps for sou'westers. The outline of their black forms was just distinguishable against the sky. They were looking straight ahead into the yellow streaks, out over the flecked sea. And not a breath of wind stirred the leaden atmosphere.

Looking down on the broad decks, it would seem at first that they were deserted, but as the eye became accustomed to the gloom, men standing like shadows could be perceived here and there—at their posts—waiting.

All the skylights had been doubly tarpaulined. Some of them had been strengthened with battens lashed transversely over the canvas. All that mortal brain could devise mortal hand had done. The rest was with God.

The decks were quite dark, for the skylights were covered, even those of the engine-room, and the men at work down there in the stifling heat knew not what the next moment might bring. They had nothing to guide them as to the moment when the hurricane would strike the ship. For the last five minutes they had been holding on to their life-rails with both hands, expecting to be thrown among the machinery at every second.

Still there was no breath of wind. The darkness was

less intense. A yellow glow seemed to be behind the cloud.

Then a strange feeling of being drawn upward came to all, and strong men gasped for breath. It was only for a moment. But the sensation was that the air was being sucked up to the sky, leaving a vacuum on the face of the waters.

Suddenly the Captain's voice startled the night, rising trumpet-like above the hiss of the steam.

"Stand *by!*" he cried.

Luke looked down to the lower bridge.

"You had better hold on to something," he called, and as he spoke the hurricane struck the *Croonah*. It can only be described as a pushing smack. She rolled slowly over before it, and it seemed that she would never stop.

CHAPTER IX

A GREAT FIGHT

"Who knows? The man is proven by the hour."

THE sea seemed to rise up and fall on the disabled ship with a wild fury. There was a strange suggestion of passion in every wave as it crashed over the bulwarks. In the roar of the hurricane there was a faint sound of crackling wood. The deck was at an angle of thirty. The port boats on their davits were invisible; they were under water. If the *Croonah* righted quickly those boats would break up like old baskets.

The two men on the lower bridge stood on the uprights of the rail, leaning against the deck as against a wall. The crackling sound like breaking matchwood seemed to come from above. Carr looked up and saw the captain and Luke at the wheel. The wheel-house had collapsed like a card-house; it had simply been blown away, and one of the helmsmen with it. The other was lying huddled up at the lower end of the narrow bridge.

For a moment the darkness lifted and the survivors saw a weird sight. One of the starboard boats, attached to the davit by only one fall, was held by the wind like

a flag straight out over the deck. Already two men were clambering to the upper bridge to take the place of the helmsmen who were dead. Relieved from the wheel, Luke dragged himself up to the ladder leading from the upper to the lower deck. A few moments later they saw him cutting with a hatchet at the ropes holding the boat to the davit. There were four, for it was a heavy boat, held by a double block. He cut two at a stroke: the others ran out instantly. The boat disappeared to leeward like a runaway hat, and fell with a splash into the foaming sea.

The *Croonah* seemed to feel the relief. She rose a little to windward, but her lee-rail was still under water. Down in the scuppers, in the tangle of ropes and splintered wood, sundry dark forms, looking more like bundles of dirty rags than anything else, rolled and tossed helplessly. These were dead and drowning men. Already the European sailors were at work, some cutting away useless top-hamper, others attempting to drag the terror-stricken Malays to a place of comparative safety. Luke FitzHenry took command of these men, as was his duty, working like one of them, with infinite daring. He could only communicate with his captain by signs, speech being impossible. It was a seaman's fight. Each man did that which seemed to him expedient for the safety of the ship. The *Croonah* was fully equipped for fine weather—for cleaning brasses and swabbing decks and bending awnings; but for bad weather—notably for a cyclone—she was perilously undermanned.

Half of the native crew were paralyzed by fear, many were killed, others drowned from a mere incapacity to hold on.

The other officers of the ship had their hands more than full. The doctor was below in the saloon surrounded by a babel of shrieking women and white-faced men; the engineers were on watch at their deadly posts in the heart of the ship.

Carr turned and clambered down the iron ladder to the upper deck. He was half a sailor and quite an Englishman. Moreover he came from Harrow, where they teach a certain bull-dog courage.

Luke, working half blinded by spray and salt water, presently found a strong man working at his side. Together they cut away the submerged boats, standing to their waists in water, at infinite peril of their lives; together they made their way forward to help the chief officer and his devoted gang, who were cutting away the foremast and the wreckage of forward boats.

Through the long hours of the night these dauntless men worked unceasingly, and—incongruous practical details—the stewards brought them food at stated intervals, while two men served out spirits all the while. Slowly, inch by inch, they righted the ship, bringing her stubborn prow gradually into the wind; and all the while the engines throbbed, all the while the grimy stokers shovelled coal into the furnaces, all the while the engineers stood and watched their engines.

Dawn broke on a terrific sea and a falling wind.

The night was over and the dread Bay had had her thousand lives and more, for a cyclone simply wipes out the native craft like writing on a slate. The *Croonah* had been right through the corner of the worst cyclone of a generation. Luke crawled back to the bridge where the captain stood, as he had stood all night, motionless. Sheer skill and a great experience had pulled the *Croonah* through.

When the danger was past those who were on deck saw a man in shirt and trousers only, his grey hair ruffled, his clothes glued to his limbs by perspiration, emerge from the bowels of the ship. He came on deck, passed by those who scarce knew him without his gold braid, and slowly climbed the ladder to the bridge. There, in the early morning light, the two men who had saved three hundred lives—the captain and the chief engineer—silently shook hands.

"I had to keep you down there for the safety of the ship," said the Captain, gruffly.

"All right, old man, I knew that."

The old engineer turned and looked fore and aft over the wrecked decks with a curious smile as if he had come back from another world.

While they stood there the saloon doors were opened and a haggard row of faces peered out. A quartermaster held the passengers back, for the decks were unsafe. Railings and bulwarks were gone, boats smashed, awning stanchions twisted and bent. No landsmen could be trusted to move safely amid such confusion.

And all the while the engines throbbed, and the *Croonah* held proudly on her course to the north—battered, torn, and sore stricken, yet a victor.

After changing their clothes Luke and Carr breakfasted together at the after-end of the second officer's table in the saloon. With a certain humour the captain allowed of no relaxation in the discipline of the ship. The breakfast bell was rung at the usual time, the meal was served with the usual profusion, even the menus were written as carefully as ever; and some good ladies opined that the captain must be a godless man, because forsooth he did not cringe beneath the wing of the passing Angel of Death.

"I am glad I saw that," said Carr, neat and clean, hearty and smiling as usual.

Luke looked up from a generous plate. He thought that Carr was indulging in bravado, but he relinquished this opinion when he saw the man's face and his helping of bacon and eggs. Carr seemed to have enjoyed the cyclone, as he had no doubt enjoyed many a game of football in his youth, and many a spin across country later. For this man kept his hunters. He was moved thereto by that form of self-respect which urges some men to live like gentlemen, to, as they express it, "do themselves well," whether their mere monetary circumstances allow of it or no; and some one usually pays for these philosophers—that is the annoying part of it.

"By gad! I didn't think it could blow like that though!" Carr went on, with his mouth full.

"I don't think it can often," replied Luke. He could not help liking this man, despite his first prejudice against him. Besides, they had stood shoulder to shoulder, with death around them, and such moments draw differing men together. It is the required touch of Nature, this same death, which frightens us before it comes and seems so gentle when it is here.

"I always wanted to see a cyclone," went on Carr, conversationally, "and now I'm satisfied. I have had enough. I shouldn't have cared for more. Pass, cyclones!"

"It is not many men who have your laudable thirst for experience," said Luke. "It is rather a strenuous form of pleasure."

"Pleasure!" answered Carr, with one of his sharp glances. "Pleasure, be d——d! It's business, sir, business. I mean to make money out of cyclones."

"How? Bottle them up and make them turn a windmill?"

"No, sir."

Carr turned round to make sure that he could not be overheard.

"No, sir. Your idea is not bad in the main, though hardly practicable. No. I know a dodge worth two of that! I told you before that I am in the marine insurance line. Now, the funny part of the marine insurance line is that the majority of the men engaged in it do not know their business. There are a lot of old fossils sitting up at Lloyd's now who are no more

fit to underwrite than they are to join the heavenly choirs! There are a lot of young snobs from the universities who think that underwriting consists in swaggering up to the City at eleven o'clock and putting their name to anything that they're told to. Now I propose to teach these gentlemen their business."

"Will they thank you for it?" asked Luke.

"They'll pay me for it, which is better, by a long chalk! Ha, ha! Butter, please."

"And what have cyclones got to do with it!"

Again one of the sharp glances which sat so strangely on Carr's open countenance.

"I understand there is a science of cyclones," he said quietly.

"Yes."

"Which means that you chaps knew what was coming forty-eight hours ago."

"Yes," replied Luke.

"That that chap flying signals yesterday was talking to you about it."

"Yes."

"And that when you got into it you knew exactly whereabouts you were in it; where the centre was, and which was the shortest way out of it, to get clear away from the vortex and beyond the axis line, so as not to get into it again."

"Yes. You're quite a Fitzroy."

Carr winked cheerily.

"And all this is a certainty?"

"A dead certainty," replied Luke. "It is a science."

Carr laid down his knife and fork.

"Suppose," he said, "that the next cyclone sends forty ships to kingdom come, and I've got a line of five hundred or a thousand insured on every one of them. I'll study these jolly old cyclones. It will be easy enough to know about when they'll be coming. When one is about I'll have a line on every ship at sea between Colombo and Penang—do you see? I'll get a man on the coast here to watch the weather. When there's a cyclone in the Bay of Bengal he will wire me home one word, 'Milksop,' or 'Spongecake,' or something soft and innocent. I'll do the rest, my boy."

Luke was only pretending to eat. The desire to make money was strong upon him—as indeed were all his desires—it was almost a passion; for money meant Agatha, and Agatha had grown to be the one absorbing passion of his heart. Agatha had been at the back of the superhuman fight which he had waged all night against death. Agatha was behind Carr's words. The thought of her was tempting him through the man's arguments.

"But what will you insure?" he asked.

"Profit," replied Carr, in a whisper. "It is done every day, and the fossils and the young smugs write it—policy proof of interest—the fools!"

"What is policy proof of interest?"

"It means that they admit your insurance to be valid, whether you have anything on board the ship or not. It

is not legal, but they know it when they sign the policy; and they know that it would ruin them if they refused to pay an 'honour policy.' I tell you they don't know their business, and they have no combination. They all distrust each other, and tell lies to each other about their profits and their losses. If I insure profit I have only to say that I shall lose money if the ship does not reach her destination and deliver her cargo safely. The cargo may be mine; I may be buying it or selling it; no one can tell, and the underwriters don't ask. They pocket their premium, and if they have to pay, and think they have been rooked, they keep it to themselves, because each man is against his neighbour."

"But do they know nothing about cyclones?" inquired Luke.

"My good sir, they hardly know the difference between Calcutta and Bombay. Half of them think that a cyclone and a monsoon are the same thing, and not one in ten could tell you the difference between a brig and a barquantine."

Luke gave a little half-convinced laugh. The man was so open and honest that his arguments had nothing underhand or crafty in them.

"It sounds very simple," he said.

"It is—d—d simple! So are the underwriters; but that is not our business. You see, FitzHenry, in all commerce there are a certain number of fools for the wise men to outwit. In marine insurance there are a large number. All insurance is nothing but a bet, and

betting is a matter of intelligence. We bring more intelligence to bear upon it than the other chap, therefore we win."

He helped himself to marmalade with a jaunty hand. Luke hardly noticed the easy transition from "I" to "we." He had had no intention of suggesting a partnership in this easy manner of making money, but the partnership seemed to have formed itself.

"But——" Carr paused, holding in the air an emphatic spoon. "But, my boy, we want capital, we want to lay our hands on fifty thousand pounds."

"I am afraid I could not lay my hand on fifty thousand pence," said Luke.

Carr glanced at him sharply. There was a little pause while Carr ate marmalade and toast.

"Oh yes, you could," he said in a low tone. "Between us we could raise fifty thousand as easy as winking."

As if to demonstrate the facility of the latter, he looked up and closed his left eye confidentially.

"You're a sailor," he went on to say, "and a ripping good one at that. You know the perils of the deep, as the parsons say. It wouldn't be hard for you to tell when the *Croonah* was running into a tight place like yesterday. All you have to do is to wire home one word to me. My telegraphic address is, 'Simple, London.' Say you wire home 'Milksop.' We could fix on 'Milksop'; it sounds so d—d innocent! In twenty-four hours I'd have fifty thousand done on the *Croonah* in London, Glasgow, Liverpool, New York, Paris, and

Germany—spread about, you know. In four or five days the *Croonah* goes to the bottom and we scoop in, your name never appearing—see ?"

There was a little pause.

"See ?" repeated Carr in little more than a whisper.

Luke looked up. He met Carr's eyes and knew that he was dealing with a villain. The strange part of it was that he felt no anger. He could not free his mind from the thought of Agatha. There was one corner of the steamer which was almost sacred to him—the little space behind the deck-house where he had held Agatha in his arms for one moment of intense happiness—where she told him that she could not be poor.

Carr rose and threw down his table napkin with a certain grand air which was his.

"It would be the making of you," he said. "It is worth thinking about."

He threw back his shoulders—a trick common enough with strongly-built men who incline to stoutness—nodded and left him. He passed down the length of the saloon, seeking his cigar-case in the pocket of his coat, exchanging loud and hearty greetings with those among the passengers whom he knew. He was popular on account of the open British frankness which he cultivated, and which is supposed to be the outward sign of an honest heart. He seemed to be thinking of his great scheme no longer, but he left Luke to brood over it—to try and chase the word "Milksop" from his brain, where it seemed to be indelibly engraved.

He left Luke to fight against a great temptation alone and heavily handicapped, for Luke Fitz-Henry was held as in a vice by his passionate love for Agatha. It is not all men who can love. It is only a few who are capable of a deep passion. This is as rare as genius. A man of genius is usually a failure in all except his own special line. The man who can and does love passionately must be a good man indeed if his love do not make a villain of him.

CHAPTER X

THE EDITOR'S ROOM

"The greater man, the greater courtesy."

THE Count de Lloseta and John Craik were sitting together in the editorial room of the *Commentator*.

It was a quiet room with double windows and a permanent odour of tobacco smoke. An empty tea-cup stood on the table by John Craik's elbow.

"Name of God!" Cipriani de Lloseta had ejaculated when he saw it. "At eleven o'clock in the morning!"

"Must stir the brain up," was the reply.

"I would not do it with a tea-spoon," De Lloseta had answered, and then he sat down to correct the proof of Eve's fourth article on "Spain and Spanish Life."

They had been sitting thus together for half an hour in friendly silence, only broken by an occasional high-class Spanish anathema hurled at the head of the printer.

"A dog's trade!" ejaculated De Lloseta at last, leaning back and throwing down his pen, "a dog's trade, my friend!"

"It is mine," replied Craik, without looking up. In fiction he was celebrated for a certain smartness of

dialogue. His printed conversations were pretty displays of social sword-play. It had become a sort of habit with him to thrust and parry quickly; but the sudden smile on his lined face, the kindly glance from behind the spectacles always took away the sting and demonstrated that it was mere "copy," to fill up the dull columns of life and throw in a sparkle here and there.

"Have you finished?" he inquired.

"Yes, thank Heaven! I was not intended for a literary calling. That is number four, and I am not paid—I am not paid; there lies the sting."

"Number four, yes; two published and two in hand," replied John Craik. His mind was busy elsewhere; it was with the creatures of his own imagination, living their lives, rejoicing with them, sorrowing with them.

The Count rose and walked gravely to the hearthrug, holding the proof-sheets in his hand.

"Number four," he reiterated. "Will they go on, my friend?"

John Craik looked up sharply.

"No."

"How many more will you accept?"

"Two more at the outside, making six in all. The public is like a greedy child, it must be stopped before it makes itself sick. Nausea leaves a lasting distaste behind it for that which preceded it."

The Count nodded.

"And this worldly wisdom—is it the editor or the man who speaks?"

"The editor.' The editor is a man who lives by saying 'No.'"

"And you will say 'No' to any more from this —— writer's pen."

"To any more about Spain I most certainly shall."

The Count reflected. What little light the London day afforded fell full upon his long narrow face, upon the pointed Velasquez chin, the receding iron-grey hair brushed straight back.

"And the fact that the writer is supporting herself and a worn-out old uncle by her pen will make no difference?"

John Craik hesitated for a moment.

"Not the least," he then said. "You seem to know the writer."

"I do, and I am interested in her."

"A lady?" John Craik was dotting his *i*'s with the contemplativeness of artistic finish.

"Essentially so."

"And poor?"

"Yes, and proud as——"

"A Spaniard," suggested John Craik.

"If you will. It is a vice which has almost become a virtue in these democratic days."

John Craik looked up.

"I will do what I can, Lloseta," he said. "But she is not a great writer, and will never become one."

"I know that. Some day she will become a great lady, or I know nothing of them."

Craik was still busy touching up his manuscript.

"I have never seen her," he said. "But the impression I received from her manuscripts is that she is a girl who has lived a simple life among a simple people. She has seen a great deal of nature, out-of-door nature, which is pure, and cannot be too deeply studied. She has seen very little of human nature, which is not so pure as it might be. That is her chief charm of style, a high-minded purity. She does not describe the gutter and think she is writing of the street. By the way, I am expecting her here" (he paused, and looked at the clock on the mantelpiece) "in exactly two minutes."

The Count rose quickly and took his hat. As he extended his hand to say "Good-bye" there was a rap at the door. The discreet youth, who told John Craik's falsehoods for him, came in and handed his master a slip of paper with a name written thereon.

Craik read the inscription, crumpled up the paper, and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

"In one minute," he said, and the liar withdrew.

Cipriani de Lloseta, with a quiet deliberation which was sometimes almost dramatic, stooped over the paper basket and recovered the crumpled slip of paper. He did not unfold it, but held it out, crushed up in his closed fist.

"Miss Eve Challoner," he said.

John Craik nodded.

De Lloseta laughed and threw the paper into the fire.

"I must not be seen. Where do you propose to put me?"

"Go upstairs instead of down," replied John Craik, as if he had been asked the same question before. "Wait on the next landing until you hear this door close; you may then escape in safety."

"Thanks—good-bye."

"Good-bye."

When Eve entered the room John Craik was writing. He rose with a bow savouring of a politer age than ours, and held out his hand.

"At last," he said, "I have prevailed upon you to come and see me. Will you sit down? The chair is shabby, but great men and women have sat in it."

He spoke pleasantly, with his twisted laugh, and when Eve was seated he sat slowly, carefully down again. He was thinking not so much of what he was saying as of his hearer. He saw that Eve was undeniably beautiful—the man saw that. The novelist saw that she was probably interesting. As he had just stated, great women had sat in the same chair, and it was John Craik's impulse to save Eve from that same greatness. He had, since a brilliant youth at Oxford, been steeped, as it were, in literature. He had known all the great men and women, and he held strong views of his own. These were probably erroneous—many women will think so—but he held to them. They were based on experience, which is not always the case with views expressed in print and elsewhere. John Craik held that greatness is not good for women. That it is not for their own

happiness, he knew. That it is not for the happiness of those around them, he keenly suspected. Some of Eve's celebrated predecessors in that chair had not quite understood John Craik. All thought that he was not sufficiently impressed—not, that is, so impressed by them as they were themselves when they reflected upon their own renown.

He looked at Eve quickly, rubbing his hands together.

"May I, as an old man, ask some impertinent questions?" he inquired, with a cheerfulness which sat strangely on the wan face.

"Yes."

"Why do you write?" he said. "Take time; answer me after reflection."

Eve reflected while the great editor stared into the fire.

"To make money," she answered at last.

He looked up and saw that she was answering in simple good faith.

"That is right."

He did not tell her that he was sick and tired of the jargon of art for art's sake, literature for literature's sake. He did not tell that—practical man of the world that he was—he had no faith in literary art; that he believed the power of writing to be a gift and nothing else; that the chief art in literature is that which is unconscious of itself.

"Do you feel within yourself the makings of a great author?"

Eve laughed, a sudden girlish laugh, which made John Craik reduce his estimate of her age by five years.

"No," she answered.

He sat up and looked at her with a kind admiration.

"You are refreshing," he said, "very, especially to a man who has seen stout and elderly females sit in that same chair and state their conviction that they were destined to be George Eliots or Charlotte Brontës, women who had written one improper or irreligious novel, which had obtained a certain success in the foolish circles."

"Do you think I have," asked Eve, "the—the makings of an income?"

John Craik reflected.

"A small one," he said bluntly.

"That is all I want."

Craik raised his eyebrows.

"And renown," he said, "do you want that?"

"Not in the least, except for its intrinsic value."

Craik banged his hand down on the arm of his chair and laughed aloud.

"This is splendid!" he cried. "I have never met such a practical person. Then you would be content to work for a sufficient income without ever being known to the world?"

"Yes, provided that the work was genuine and not given to me out of mere charity."

The editor of the *Commentator* looked at her gravely. He had suddenly remembered Cipriani de Llosceta.

"Oh, you are proud!" he said.

Eve laughed with a negative shake of the head.

"Not more than other people," she answered.

"Not more than other people. Well, we will have it so. And not ambitious."

"No, I think not."

"You may thank God for that," said John Craik, half to himself. "An ambitious woman is not a pleasant person."

There was a little pause, during which John Craik rubbed his chin reflectively with his bony fingers.

"And now," he said, "that I know something about you I will tell you why I asked you to be good enough to come and see me. To begin with, I am an old man; you can see that for yourself. I am a martyr to rheumatism, and I frequently suffer from asthma, otherwise I should have done myself the pleasure of calling on you. I wanted to see you because lady authors are uncertain creatures. A large majority of them have nothing better to do, and therefore write. Others do not care for the money, but they do most decidedly for the renown. The nudge and whisper of society is nectar to them. Others again are brilliant in flashes and dull in long periods. Few, very few are content to work with their pen as their poorer sisters are forced to work with their needles. In that lies the secret of the more permanent success of men journalists and men authors. The journalism and the authorship are not the men, but merely the business of their lives. Now will you be content to work hard and steadily without any great

hope of renown, to work, in fact, anonymously for a small but certain income?"

"Yes," answered Eve, without hesitation.

Craik nodded his head gravely and thoughtfully. He was too deeply experienced to fall into the error of thinking that Eve was different from other women. He did not for a moment imagine that he had secured in her a permanent subscriber to the *Commentator*—possibly he did not want her as such. He was merely doing a good deed—no new thing to him, although his right hand hardly knew what his left was doing. He liked Eve, he admired her, and was interested in her. Cipriani de Lloseta he was deeply interested in, and he knew, with the keen instinct of the novelist, that he was being drawn into one of those romances of real life which exist in the matter-of-fact nineteenth century atmosphere that we breathe.

So Eve Challoner left John Craik's office an independent woman for the time being, and the charity was so deeply hidden that her ever-combative pride had failed to detect it.

CHAPTER XI

THE CURTAIN LOWERS

"The shadow, cloaked from head to foot,
Who keeps the keys of all the creeds."

As she walked back to Grosvenor Gardens, Eve reflected with some satisfaction that the Ingham-Bakers had left Mrs. Harrington's hospitable roof. From this shelter they had gone forth into a world which is reputed cold, and has nevertheless some shelter still for such as are prepared to cringe to the overbearing, to flatter the vain, to worship riches.

Eve wanted time to think over her new position, to reflect with satisfaction over her new independence, for the Caballero Challoner, if he had bequeathed little else, had left to her a very active pride. She knew so little of the world that she never paused to wonder why John Craik should have made her a proposal which could hardly be beneficial to himself. She was innocent enough to think that the good things of this world are given just where and when they are wanted.

Captain Bontnor was the chief object of her thoughts, and she was already dreaming of restoring him to

Malabar Cottage and his bits of things. So engrossed was she in these reflections, that she noticed nothing unusual in the face of the butler who opened the door which had shut upon Luke FitzHenry some years before.

"I'm glad you're back, miss," he said gravely.

Something in his tone—cold and correct—caught Eve's attention.

"Why?" she asked, and a consoling knowledge that the *Terrific* was safe in Chatham Dockyard leapt into her mind.

"Mrs. Harrington's been took rather bad, miss."

The man's manner said more than his words. Eve hurried upstairs to Mrs. Harrington's bedroom. She tapped at the door and went in without waiting. There was a strong smell of ammonia in the air. The blinds were half lowered, and in the dim light Eve did not see very clearly. Presently, from the depths of a huge four-poster bed, she descried a pair of keen eyes—the face of Mrs. Harrington. The face, the eyes, the mind were alive, the body was stricken; it was almost dead already. Mrs. Harrington looked down at the shapeless limbs beneath the coverlet with something like fear in her eyes, something of the expression of a dog that has been run over. This woman meant to die hard.

Eve knew little of life, but she was no stranger to death. She recognized our last enemy in the grey face beneath the canopy of the four-poster.

"Where have you been so long, child?" said

Harrington querulously, "leaving me to these fools of servants. I have been unwell, but I'm better now. They've sent for the doctor. I shall be better presently. I have no pain, only—only a sort of numbness."

She looked down at her left hand, which lay outside the coverlet, and fear was in her eyes. She had defied men too long to be afraid of God, but she did not want to die; she had too keen an enjoyment for the good things of this world.

Eve came to the bedside.

Mrs. Harrington's face was drawn together in anger. She was annoyed that Death should have come for her, and, true to herself, she insulted him by deliberately ignoring his presence. There was something defiant in her cold eyes still, something unbeaten, although she knew that there was no one on her side. The general feeling was against her. So far as the world was concerned, Death could have her.

Eve turned away from the bed and faced the doctor, who was coming into the room with Mrs. Harrington's maid. No one displayed the slightest emotion. A selfish life and a happy death are rarely vouchsafed to the same person. The doctor did not ask Eve to stay, so she went downstairs and wrote to Fitz, sending the note round to his rooms in Jermyn Street by a servant. It was the second time in her life that she had sent for Fitz.

When the doctor came downstairs, Eve went out into the hall. He pointed with his finger to the room from

which she came, and followed her back there. He was a middle-aged man, educated to the finger tips—all science and no heart.

"Are you a relation of Mrs. Harrington's?" he inquired.

"We are distantly connected," answered Eve.

The doctor was not giving much attention to her answer. He had a habit of tapping his teeth with his thumbnail, which made Eve dislike him at sight.

"Has she any one else?" he asked. "Any one who—cares?"

He was quite without the intention of being rude, but he was absorbed in his profession, and had a large practice. He wanted to go.

"She has a nephew. I have sent for him."

The doctor nodded. He glanced at Eve, then he said quietly—

"She will live about an hour. She wants me to come again and bring another man. I will do it, although it is useless. There are some things money cannot buy."

With a quick mechanical smile he was gone.

Eve went upstairs again to the room where Mrs. Harrington was fighting her last fight. As she passed up the stairs, she noticed two letters on the hall table awaiting postage, one was addressed to Mrs. Ingham-Baker, the other to Luke, at Malta.

Mrs. Harrington had ordered the blinds to be pulled up, and the daylight showed her face to be little changed. It had always been grey; the shadows on it

now were grey; the eyes were active and bright. It was only the body that was dying; Mrs. Harrington's mind was bright and keen as ever.

"That doctor is a fool," she said. "I have told him to come back and bring Sir James Harlow with him. And will you please send and tell Fitz that I should like to see him. You must arrange to stay on a few days until I am better. Captain Bontnor will have to do without you. My servants are not to be trusted alone. I shall want you to keep them in order; they require a tight rein."

"I have sent for Fitz," said Eve.

"Why?" snapped Mrs. Harrington. "To come and make love to you? Leave that to Agatha. She has been teaching them both to do that for the last three years. Her idea is to marry the one who gets my money. I've known that all along."

Eve's dark eyes hardened suddenly. She could not believe what the doctor had told her five minutes earlier. Five minutes—one-twelfth part of Mrs. Harrington's life ebbed away.

"Pray do not talk like that," said the girl, quietly.

Mrs. Harrington's cold grey eyes fell before Eve's glance of mingled wonder and contempt; her right hand was feebly plucking at the counterpane.

Far below, in the basement, a bell rang, and soon after there was a step on the stairs.

"Who is that?" inquired Mrs. Harrington.

"Fitz."

The dying woman was looking at the door with an unwonted longing in her eyes.

"You seem to know his step," she said, with a jealous laugh.

Eve said nothing. The door opened and Fitz came in.

Mrs. Harrington was the first to speak.

"I am not well this morning, dear," she said. "I sent for you because I have a few things I want you to do for me."

"Pleasure," murmured Fitz, glancing at Eve. He either did not know how ill Mrs. Harrington was, or he did not care. It is probable that these two persons now at the dying woman's bed were the only two people who would be in any degree sorry at her death.

Eve, with a woman's instinct, busied herself with the pillow—with the little adjuncts of a sick-room which had already found their way to the bedside. She looked at Mrs. Harrington's face, saw the hard eyes fixed on Fitz, and something in the glance made her leave the room.

"Just leave me alone," the dying woman said peevishly as Eve went away; "I don't want a lot of people bothering about."

But Fitz stayed, and when Eve had closed the door the sudden look of cunning that came over the faded face did not appear to surprise him.

"Quick!" whispered Mrs. Harrington, "quick! I do not believe I am dying, as that doctor said I was, but it is better to make sure. Open the left hand drawer in the dressing-table, you will find my keys."

Fitz obeyed her, bringing the bunch of keys, rusty and black from being concealed in a thousand different hiding-places.

"Now," she said, "open that desk; it was—your father's. Bring it here. Be quick! Some one may come."

Her shrivelled fingers fumbled hastily among some old papers. Finally she found an envelope, brown with age, on which was written, in her own spidery handwriting, "Recipe for apple jelly."

She thrust the envelope into Fitz's hands, and he smilingly read the superscription.

"That's nothing," she explained sharply; "that's only for the servants. One cannot be too careful. Inside there is some money. I saved it up. It will help to furnish your new cabin."

"Thank you," said Fitz, looking critically at the envelope. "But——"

"You must take it," she interrupted; "it is the only money I ever saved." She broke off with a malicious laugh. "All these fools thought I was rich," she went on. "They have been scheming and plotting to get my money. There is no money. That is all there is. You and Luke were the only two who never thought about it. You are both like your father. Here, shut the desk up again. Put it back on the table. Now hide the keys—left-hand corner, under the box of hairpins."

Fitz obeyed her and came back towards the bed. His large mind felt a sudden contempt for this petty and

mean woman. He did not understand her, and the contempt he felt for her in some way hurt him. He was afraid of what she was going to say next.

"But," she said, "if I get better you must give me the money back."

Fitz gave a little laugh. Something prompted him to open the envelope and look at the contents. There were five notes of ten pounds each. The rich Mrs. Harrington, of Grosvenor Gardens, had saved fifty pounds, and she lay on her death-bed watching Fitz count this vast hoard with a quiet deliberation. In its way it was a tragedy—the grimmest of all—for its dominant note was the contemptibility of human nature.

"I do not want the money. I should not keep it under any circumstances."

"What would you do with it?" she asked sharply.

"Give it to a charity."

"No, no, you must not do that; they are all swindles!"

In her eagerness she tried to sit up, and fell back with a puzzled look on her face, as if some one had struck her.

"Here," she gasped, "give it to me! give it to me!"

She clutched the envelope in her unsteady hands, and suddenly her jaw dropped.

Fitz ran to the door. On the stairs were the two doctors, followed closely by Eve. In a moment the doctors were at the bedside.

"Yes," said one of them—the younger of the two—and he glanced at his watch. "I gave her an hour."

The elder man took the dead woman's hand in his. He released the envelope from her grasp and read the superscription, "Recipe for apple jelly." With a grave smile he handed the envelope to Eve as Fitz took her out of the room.

They went downstairs together, and both were thinking of D'Erraha. They went into the library, which was silent and gloomy. Fitz had not spoken yet, but she seemed to understand his silence, just as she had understood it once before. She had told him then. She did not do so now.

Eve was not thinking of the dead woman upstairs. This death came to her only as a faint reflection of the one great grief which had cut her life in two—as great griefs do. She was perhaps wondering how it was that Fitz seemed always to come to her at those moments when she could not do without him. She was more probably not thinking at all, but resting as it were in the sense of complete safety and protection which this man's presence gave her.

There was a little silence, broken only by the sound of street traffic faintly heard through the plate-glass windows. Fitz was looking at her, his blue eyes grave and searching. This was not a man to miss his opportunity, this youngest commander on the list.

"Eve," he said, "I used to think at D'Erraha that you cared for me."

"I have always cared for you," she answered, with a queer little smile, half bold, half shy.

So Love came in at the windows as Death crept up the stairs.

Before long they heard the doctors go away, but they heeded not. They only forgot each other when Cipriani de Lloseta came into the room. The Spaniard's quick eyes read something in Eve's face. He looked sharply at Fitz, but he said nothing of what he saw.

"So our dear lady has been taken from us," he said quietly, with an upward jerk of the head.

Fitz nodded. Cipriani de Lloseta walked to the window and quietly drew down the blind.

"So falls the curtain," he said, "on the little drama of my humble life."

He turned and looked from one to the other with that sudden warmth of love which either of them seemed able to draw from him.

"Some day," he said, "I will tell you—you two—the story, but not now."

He stepped forward and raised Eve's fingers to his lips. A quaint, half-Spanish grace marked the picture of Southern chivalry.

"My child," said Lloseta, "may Heaven always bless you!" And he left them.

CHAPTER XII

"MILKSOP"

"What have we made each other?"

THE cathedral bells were calling good Papists to their morning devotion as the *Croonah* moved into Valetta harbour. No sooner did her black prow appear between the pier heads than a score of boats left the steps, their rowers gesticulating, quarrelling, laughing among themselves with Maltese vivacity.

One boat flying the *Croonah's* houseflag made its way more leisurely through the still, clear water. This boat was bringing mails to the *Croonah*, and in the letter-bag Mrs. Harrington's last missive to Luke had found its place. This letter had been posted by the well-trained footman while Eve and Fitz stood at Mrs. Harrington's bedside. Before it was stamped at the district office the hand that wrote it was still. And it contained mischief. Even after her death Mrs. Harrington brought trouble to the man whose life she had spoilt by her caprice. The letter ran:—

"DEAR LUKE,

"Just a line to tell you that you may bring your portmanteau straight up to Grosvenor Gardens when your ship arrives in London. I read of your fortunate escape from the cyclone, and congratulate you. I dare say I shall be having a few friends to stay when you are with me, so you need not fear dulness.

"Yours affectionately,

"MARIAN HARRINGTON.

"P.S.—I always suspect you of having, consciously or unconsciously, possessed yourself of the affections of a young lady who shall be nameless. A word to the wise: make good use of your opportunities, for there are other aspirants in the field—a certain brilliant young naval officer not unknown to you. Moreover his chance appears to be a good one. You must waste no more time."

It happened that Luke FitzHenry was in a dangerous mood when he read this letter. He had been up half the night. The captain had been cross-grained and unreasonable. Even the mildest of us has his moments of clear-sightedness when he sees the world and the hollowness thereof. Luke saw this and more when he had read Mrs. Harrington's evil communication. He seemed to have reached the end of things, when his present life became no longer tolerable. It must be remembered that this man was passionate and very resolute. Moreover he had been handicapped from th

beginning of his life by a tendency to go wrong. He was not a good subject for ill-fortune.

It was his duty to go ashore with papers to be delivered at the agent's office. He delivered his papers and then he went to the cable office. He telegraphed the single word "Milksop" to Willie Carr in London. When he got back to the *Croonah*, worn out, dirty and morose, the passengers were not yet astir. He had an unsatisfactory breakfast, and went to his cabin for a few hours' necessary sleep. He had given way to a great temptation, not as the weak give way, on the spur of the moment, with hesitation, but as a strong man—strong even in his weaknesses.

He did it after mature deliberation—did it thoroughly and carefully, without the least intention of regretting it afterwards. He was desperate and driven. He could not think of life without Agatha, and he did not see why he should be called upon to do so. Ill fortune had dogged him from his childhood. He had borne it all, morosely but without a murmur. He was going to turn at last. The *Croonah* must go. She was well insured, he knew that. That the cargo was fully covered against loss he could safely suppose. As to the passengers and the crew, none of them should suffer; he thought he was a clever enough sailor for that.

So he laid him down in his little cabin to sleep, while the sun rose over the blue Mediterranean, while some passengers went ashore and others came on board, while the single word "Milksop" was spelt over a continent;

and he was still sleeping when the anchor was jerked up from its muddy bed, and the watchers on pier and harbour looked their last on the grand old *Croonah*.

A breeze was blowing out in the open, one of those bright westerly breezes that bring a breath of the Atlantic into the Mediterranean, and often make the short passage from Malta to Gibraltar the worst part of the voyage from India to the Channel.

None of the passengers took any interest in the morose second officer, and few of them remarked his absence from table during the two days' passage. The *Croonah* arrived at Gibraltar after dark, took her mails and passengers on board, and proceeded down the straits about eight o'clock in the evening. It was late autumn, and the breeze from the cool Atlantic still hurried in over the parched lands of Africa and Southern Europe.

Tarifa light was sighted and left twinkling behind. Trafalgar stared out of the darkness ahead, and in its turn was left behind. A few of the passengers had recovered their Mediterranean ill-usage sufficiently to dine in the straits, but the Atlantic swell soon sent them below. The decks were deserted, for many of these people were returning to England after long years in India, and the first chill northern breeze they met made them shiver while it delighted them.

Luke FitzHenry was on the bridge from eight o'clock till midnight, motionless at his post—a mere navigating machine, respected and feared by all who worked with him, understood of none.

When midnight came he exchanged a few words with the first officer, and together they superintended the shaking out of the foresails before the watch went below. The wind was on the quarter, strong and steady. Almost immediately the good steamer felt the canvas, leaning gently over to leeward, adding another mile to her great speed. The sea was black and the air seemed to be full of the sounds of waves breaking and hissing. Ahead the mast-head and the side-lights shone down on the face of the waters and lighted up an occasional white-capped wave. In the air, brisk and masterful, there was a sense of purpose and tension which sailors understand, while mere printed words cannot convey it to landsmen. It was a very dark night.

"St. Vincent," said Luke, tersely, as he turned to leave the bridge. The first officer, a man grown old at his post, followed the direction of his junior's gaze, but some seconds elapsed before he distinguished the light twinkling feebly low down on the horizon.

Luke went to his cabin and lay down on his berth all dressed. He was due on the bridge again at four o'clock. The *Crovnah* sailed by time-table, subjecting the winds and seas, as the great steamships do nowadays. Luke FitzHenry had calculated this to a minute before he telegraphed the single word "Milksop" to Willie Carr in London.

He was on the bridge a few minutes before eight bells rang, and found the captain. He knew his chief's customs. He knew that this wise old sailor was in the

habit of accumulating as much sleep in his brain as possible before passing Ushant light, because he lived on the bridge when the *Croonah* had once turned eastward up the Channel. Whenever the captain took a night's rest, he broke it at four o'clock, at the change of the watch. He stood muffled in a big coat over his pyjamas, and exchanged a few words with his subordinates. After the first officer had gone below, Luke went to his post at the starboard end of the bridge, while the captain walked slowly backwards and forwards. They remained thus for half an hour. The ship was all quiet. The breeze had fallen a little. There was as yet no sign of daybreak towards the east. A steamer passed, showing a red light and a white mast-head light.

Presently the captain paused in his walk near to Luke.

"Call me," he said, "when you raise the Burling light."

Luke answered with a monosyllable, and the elder sailor went towards the ladder.

No one had heard the order given. Luke followed him to the ladder, and watched him go down into the darkness. They had sailed together six years in fair weather and foul; they had fought and conquered a cyclone in the Bay together from that bridge; but Agatha Ingham-Baker was stronger than these things. Woman is the strongest thing in a man's life.

There was still no sign of daylight, no faintest gleam in the eastern sky, when the Burling light was sighted

right ahead. The lookout on the forecastle did not "sing out" the lights on board the *Croonah*, but sent a companion aft to the bridge with the report. This was done for the comfort of the passengers.

Luke altered the course half a point. From the wheel-house the men could not see the light, which was hidden by the fore-mast. Luke went aft and looked at the patent log. His calculations were all correct. He glanced at his watch—he had to go to the wheel-house to do this, and the binnacle-lights showed his face to be still and pale. He moved and had the air of a man upon whose shoulders an immense responsibility was weighing. He was going to wreck the *Croonah*, but he had two hundred and ninety lives to save. He carefully studied the eastern sky. He did not want daylight yet.

The Burling light is not a very big one—not so big, some mariners think, as it should be. It is visible twenty-five miles away; but Luke's knowledge told him that in thick and misty weather, such as hovers over this coast in a westerly wind, the glare of the revolving lamp could not be distinguished at a greater distance than ten or twelve miles.

The *Croonah* raced on, a ship full of sleeping human beings. There came a faint blue tinge into the eastern sky, a gleam over the eastern sea.

The Burling light—an eye looking round into the darkness, seeming to open and shut sleepily—grew brighter and brighter. It was right ahead! it rose as they approached it until it stood right above the bow-sprit.

Then Luke FitzHenry changed the course. The *Croonah* turned her blunt prow half a point out into the Atlantic, and she raced on; she passed by Burling Island, leaving the slowly winking eye on her starboard quarter. Ahead lay the complete darkness of the north-west horizon.

Luke stood at his post, his eyes hidden by his binoculars. He was studying the horizon in front of him—in front of the *Croonah*. There was a little lump on the horizon, like the top of a mountain sticking out of the sea; this he knew to be the rock called the Great Farilhao. Again he altered the course, still seeking the Atlantic, another quarter-point to the west. He was going to pass the Great Farilhao as he had passed the Burling, within a stone's throw. This he actually did, the rugged outline of the barren rock standing out sharply against the eastern sky. There was now nothing ahead; the horizon lay before him, clear, unbroken.

Luke moved a few paces. He went and stood by the engine-room telegraph. The engines throbbed merrily, but the steamer was still asleep. There was no sound but the thud of the piston-rods and the whispering swirl of the water lashed by the huge screw.

The *Croonah* raced on, her sails set, her engines working at full speed. Suddenly Luke FitzHenry grasped the handle of the engine-room signal. He wrenched it to one side—"Stand by." Instantly the gong answered, "Stand by." "Half speed ahead."

And half speed ahead it was. Luke FitzHenry was

clever even in his crime; he had three hundred lives to save. He stood motionless as a statue, gazing at the smooth, unbroken water in front of him; he grasped the rail and set his teeth; he stood well back with his feet firmly planted. And there was a grinding crash. The *Croonah* seemed to climb up into the air, then she stopped dead, and below—inside her—there was a long, rumbling crash, as if all that was inside her had been cast forward in confusion. She had run on to the sunken rocks that lie north-west of the Farilhoes.

A great silence followed and immediately the pattering of bare feet. A confused murmuring of voices rose from the saloon gangway—a buzzing sound, like that of a hive disturbed. A single voice rose in a shriek of mortal terror, and immediately there followed a chorus of confused shouts.

Luke already had his lips at the speaking-tube. He was telling the engineer on watch to steam ahead; he knew the danger of the *Croonah* slipping back into deep water and sinking.

In a marvellously short time the decks were thronged with people, some standing white-faced and calm in the dim light of early morning, others, mad with terror, rushing from side to side.

The strange part of it was that Luke remained alone on the bridge. The captain and the other officers were busy with the passengers. The second officer remained motionless at his post; he commanded the steersman by a wave of the arm to stay at the wheel, although he knew

that the *Croonah* would never answer her helm again; her travelling days were done.

In the dim light, now increasing momentarily, Luke FitzHenry looked down upon the wildly confused deck and saw discipline slowly assert itself. He saw the captain commanding by sheer force of individual power; he saw the quartermasters form in line across the deck and drive the passengers farther aft, leaving room to get out the boats.

In a few moments—in a marvellously short space of time—the work of saving life began. A boat was lowered, the crew slipped into their places, and a certain number of lady passengers were hastily handed down the gangway. The first boat eased away. The oars were thrown out. It was off, and some of the passengers cheered. One can never tell what men, especially Englishmen, may do when they actually see death face to face. The boat was headed to the south-east, towards the Carreiro do Mosteiro, on Burling Island, the only possible landing place.

Luke felt a touch on his arm and turned sharply. It was a quartermaster, breathless but cool.

"Captain wants you, sir. I'll take the bridge."

Luke turned to obey orders.

"Keep her steaming full speed ahead," he said, jerking his head towards the engine-room telegraph.

"Ay, sir," the man replied.

"Until the water gets to the furnaces," he added himself, "and then we're dead men."

Luke ran lightly down the iron ladder to the lower ridge, which was deserted. From thence he made his way aft to the quarter-deck. As he passed the saloon staircase he ran against two women, one was dragging the other, or attempting to do so, towards the group of passengers huddled together amidships.

"You go," the younger woman was saying, "if you want to. I will wait."

Luke stopped. The elder woman was apparently wild with terror. She had not even stopped to put on a dressing-gown. Her thin gray hair fluttered in the breeze. She was stout, and an object of ridicule even with death clutching at her.

"Go on, mother," said the younger woman, with contempt in her voice.

"Agatha!" cried Luke. "You here?"

"Yes; we came on board at Malta."

CHAPTER XIII

THE END OF THE "CROONAH"

"Our life is given us as a blank;
Ourselves must make it blest or curst."

A MAN came running along and clutched at Luke's arm.

"Captain wants you, sir, immediate!" he cried.

"All right," answered Luke. "Here, take this lady and put her into a boat."

Mrs. Ingham-Baker was clinging to him.

"Luke," she said firmly, "you must provide us with a lifeboat—a safe one. I will not stand this neglect."

"Here!" cried Luke to the man. "Take her away."

"You come along o' me, marm," said the man, with a twinkle in his eye. "I'll pervide ye with a lifeboat, bless yer heart!"

And in the dim light of the saloon stairhead lamp, Luke and Agatha were left facing each other.

"Why did you not let me know you were coming?" he asked sharply. He looked round with haggard eyes; they were quite alone.

"I had no time. We just caught the boat by an hour."

She was singularly quiet. Both of them seemed to forget that every moment lost increased the danger of their position.

"Why did you come?" he asked.

She looked at him, and there was that in her eyes that makes men mad.

"Because I could not stay away from you."

His breath came sharply with a catch.

For a few moments they forgot such things as life and death. They did more, they defied death; for surely such love as this is stronger than the mere end of life. Again it was the possibility of something good and something strong that lurked hidden behind the worldliness of Agatha Ingham-Baker, and Luke Fitz-Henry, of all men, alone had the power of bringing that possibility to the surface.

"I love you! I love you!" she cried, in a voice muffled by passion. And the pressure of his arms, strong, hard as iron—hardened by his life—was the greatest happiness her soul had known. The love of him took this cynical and so-called heartless woman of the world, took her and shook her like a leaf.

All around them the wind moaned and shrieked through the rigging; the waves, beating against the sheer side of the doomed *Croonah*, filled the air with a sound of great foreboding—the deep voice of an elemental power that knows no mercy. Within twenty feet of them men and women were struggling like dumb and driven animals for bare life—struggling shouting,

quarrelling over a paltry precedence of a minute or so in going to the boats ; within a hundred yards of them, out over the dark waters, Agatha's mother, thrown from an overturned boat, was struggling her last struggle, with her silly old face turned indignantly up to heaven. But they saw none of these things.

All the good men were wanted for the boats, and the captain, with two officers only and a few stewards, defended the gangway against the rush of the panic-stricken native crew.

"FitzHenry ! FitzHenry ! " the old captain shouted. "For God's sake, come here ! " For Luke alone was dreaded by the lascars.

But Luke and Agatha heeded nothing. These people, these lives, were nothing to them, for a passionate love is the acme of selfishness.

They heard the sounds, however ; they heard the captain calling for the man who had never failed him.

"I wrecked her for you," said Luke, in Agatha's hungry ears. "I did it all for you."

And at last the woman's vanity was satisfied ; it was thrown a sop that would suffice for its eternal greed. Luke had done this thing for her. She was quick enough to guess how and why, for she knew Willie Carr. She knew that good ships are thrown away for money's sake. The *Croonah* had been thrown away for her sake —the *Croonah*, the patient, obedient servant to Luke's slightest word, almost an animal in its mechanical intelligence, filling that place in the sailor's heart that

some men reserve for their horses and others for their wives. Women have been jealous of a ship before now. Eve was jealous of the *Terrific;* Agatha had always been jealous of the *Croonah.* And now the ship had been thrown away for her, and with his ship Luke had cast away his unrivalled reputation as a seaman, his honour as a gentleman, his conscience. He was a criminal, a thief, a murderer for Agatha's sake. She, true to her school, to her generation, to her training, was proud of it; for she was one of those unhappy women who will not have their lovers love honour more.

There was a sudden roar far down in the bowels of the vessel, and immediately volumes of steam issued from every skylight. The inrushing sea had broken down the bulk-heads, the water had reached the engine-rooms. In an instant Luke was alive to the danger—the good sailor that was within the man all awake. His trained ears and the tread of his feet on the deck told him that the screw was still.

"Come," he cried to Agatha, "you must get away in the next boat."

But Agatha resisted his arm. That which had hitherto been mere pertness in her manner and carriage had suddenly grown into a strong determination. The woman was cool and fearless.

"Not without you," she answered. "I will not leave the ship until you do."

"I must stay till the last," he said.

She looked at him with a little smile, for women love

courage, though it sometimes frightens them. She never dreamt of danger to either of them. Her trust in Luke was all-sufficient, without reserve, without hesitation.

"Then I will stay too."

For a moment his iron nerve—a nerve which had deliberately planned all this destruction—wavered.

"Why did you not let me know you were coming?" he asked desperately.

"I had no time," she answered, with a singular shortness, for she could not tell him that a letter from Mrs. Harrington to her mother—the companion to that received by Luke at Valetta—had brought about this sudden decision. She could not tell him that, egged on by a transparent hint from Mrs. Harrington that Luke was to be her heir, she and her mother had taken the first boat to Malta; that she had deliberately planned to marry him for the money that was to be his. Such a confession was impossible at that time; with his arms still round her, the mere thought of it nauseated her. For a moment she saw herself as others had seen her—a punishment which for some women is quite sufficient.

At this moment a man came running along the deck—the same quartermaster who had taken charge of Mrs. Ingham-Baker. He was a man of no nerves whatever, and of considerable humour.

"Any more ladies?" he was shouting as he ran. "Any more for the shore?"

He laughed at his own conceit as he ran—the same

fearless laugh with which he sent Mrs. Ingham-Baker down the gangway to her death. He paused, saw Luke and Agatha standing together beneath the lamp.

"Captain's callin' you like hell!" he cried. "Engine-room's full. The old ship's got it this time, sir."

"All right, I know," answered Luke, curtly; and the man ran on, shouting as he went.

At this moment the *Croonah* gave a shiver and Luke looked round hastily. He ran to the rail and looked over with a quick sailor's glance fore and aft. He turned towards Agatha again, but before he could reach her the steamer gave a lurch over to starboard. The deck seemed to rise between them. For a moment Agatha stood above him, then she half ran, half fell, down the short steep incline into his arms. Luke was ready for her, with one foot against the rail—for the deck was at an angle of thirty and more; no one could stand on it. He caught her deftly, and the breeze whirling round the deck-house blew her long hair across his face.

She never changed colour. There was the nucleus of a good and strong woman somewhere in Agatha Ingham-Baker. She clung to her lover's arms and watched his face with a faith that nothing could shake. Thus they stood during three eternal seconds, while the *Croonah* seemed to hesitate, poised on the brink. Then the great steamer slowly slid backwards, turning a little as she did so.

There was a sickening sound of gurgling water. The

Croonah was afloat, but only for a few seconds. There was no time to lower another boat, and all on board knew it. There were not many remaining, for the passengers had all left the ship—the stokers, the engineers. Amidships the captain stood, surrounded by his officers and a few European sailors—faithful to the end. They had only one boat left, and that was forward, half under water—out of the question. So they stood and waited for the ship to sink beneath them.

In the distance, on the rough sea, now grey in the light of a sullen dawn, two boats were approaching, having landed their human freight on Burling Island.

"Now, my lads," cried the captain, "if any of you are feeling like going overboard, over you go."

One man slowly took off his coat. He stooped down and unlaced his boots, while the others watched him. It seemed to take him hours. The bows of the great steamer were almost buried in the broken seas; her stern was raised high in the air, showing the screw and the rudder.

The man who preferred to swim for it looked round with a strange smile into the quiet, rough faces of his undismayed companions. It seemed to be merely a choice of deaths.

"Well, mates," he said, "so long!"

He dived overboard and swam slowly away.

Luke watched him speculatively. He knew that had he been alone he could have saved himself quite easily. With Agatha his chances were less certain. Agatha it

was who had spoilt his careful calculation. Without conceit—for he was a stubbornly self-depreciating man—he knew that his absence from his captain's side had just made the difference—the little difference between life and death—to twenty or thirty people. Had he been beside the captain and the other officers the native crew would have worked quietly and intrepidly; there would have been time for all hands to leave the *Croonah* before she slipped back into deep water.

The great steamer rolled slowly from side to side, like a helpless dumb animal in death agony, but she never righted herself, her decks were never level. At length she gave a roll to leeward and failed to recover herself. From some air-shaft there came a ceaseless whistle, deep and sonorous, like the emission of air from the bunghole of a beer-barrel. The engines were quite still, even the steam had ceased to rise.

Luke stood holding Agatha with one arm. He was watching the two boats making their way through the choppy sea towards them, and Agatha was watching his face.

The *Croonah* was now lying right over on her beam ends. Luke was standing on the wire network of the rail. Suddenly he threw himself backwards, and as they fell through space Agatha heard the captain's voice quite distinctly, as from the silence of another world.

"She's going!" he cried.

They struck the water together, Luke undermost, as he had intended. Agatha shut her eyes and clung to

him. They seemed to go down and down. Then suddenly she heard Luke's voice.

"Take a breath," he gasped short and sharp. His voice was singularly stern.

With his disengaged hand he put her hair from her face. She opened her eyes and saw him smiling at her; she saw a huge piece of wreckage poised on the edge of a wave over his head; she saw it fall; she felt the shock of it.

Luke's arm lost its hold; he rolled over feebly in the water, the blood running down his face, a sudden sense of sleep in his brain. He awoke again to find himself swimming mechanically, and opened his eyes. Close to him something white was floating, half under water. Spread out over the surface of the wave Agatha's long hair rose and fell like seaweed, almost within his grasp. It was like a horrible nightmare. He tried to reach it, but his arms were powerless; he could not make an inch of progress; he could only keep himself afloat. Agatha's face was under water. On the rise of a wave he saw her little bare foot; it was quite still. He knew that she was dead, and the blessed sleepiness took him again, dragging him down.

* * * * * *

So the last of the *Croonah* was her good name written large on a yellow telegram form, nailed to the panel of the room technically known as the Chamber of Horrors at Lloyd's.

Around this telegram a group of grave-faced men stood in silence, or with muttered words of surprise.

"The *Croonah!*" they said, "the *Croonah!*" as if a pillar of their faith had fallen. For once no one had a theory; no carpet mariner could explain this thing.

Against the jamb of the window, behind them all, Willie Carr stood leaning.

"Done anything on her?" some one asked him.

"Yes, bad luck;" he answered. "Had friends on her, too."

It was a long and expansive telegram, giving the list of the lost, twenty-nine in all, and among the names were mentioned Mrs. Ingram-Baker and her daughter.

"Ship in charge of second officer," said the telegram. And lower down, at the foot of the fatal list: "Second officer picked up unconscious. Doing well."

Suddenly Willie Carr moved, and, turning his back somewhat hastily, looked out of the window.

Fitz had just come into the dreary, fateful little room, conducted thither by the Admiralty agent. He read the telegram carefully from beginning to end.

"Luke on the Burlings!" he muttered, as he turned to go. "Luke! I can't understand it. He must have been mad!"

And after all Fitz only spoke the truth; but it was a madness to which we are all subject.

CHAPTER XIV

AT D'ERRAHA AGAIN

"There is no statue so sublime
As Love's in all the world; and e'en to kiss
The pedestal is still a better bliss
Than all ambitions."

THREE years later Eve was sitting on the terrace of the Casa d'Erraha. It was late autumn, and we who live in Northern latitudes do not quite realize what the autumn of Southern Europe is. Artists and others interested in the beauties of nature love a dry summer for the autumn that is sure to follow it. In Spain and in the islands of the Mediterranean every summer is dry, and every autumn is beautiful.

The Casa d'Erraha has not changed in any way—nothing changes in the Balearics. The same soft Southern odours creep up from the valley to battle with the strong resinous scent of the pines that crown the mountains.

Eve had been a year in D'Erraha—the whole of her married life. The Count de Lloseta placed the house at their disposal for the honeymoon. Fitz and she came

to stay a month ; they had remained twelve. It is often so in Majorca. A number of Spaniards came six hundred years ago—nine families ; the nine names are there to-day.

Fitz had taken D'Erraha on the Minorcan rotas lease, so the old valley, the old house, was his.

Eve was not alone on the terrace, for a certain small gentleman, called Henry Cyprian FitzHenry, a prospective sailor, lay in a pink and perfect slumber on her lap. Henry Cyprian fully appreciated the valley of repose.

Eve was reading a letter—a lamentable scrawl, by the way—obviously the work of a hand little used to the pen.

"My dearie," the letter ran, and it bore the address—Malabar Cottage, Somarsh, Suffolk.

"My Dearie,

"Please thank your good husband for his letter to me announcing the birth of your son. I hope the little man is doing well. Make a sailor of him. Being one myself I have had opportunity of noticing seafaring men under different circumstances, and I have never had an occasion to be ashamed of a shipmate, only excepting when he was drunk, which is human, so to speak. Thanking the captain kindly for his inquiries, I have to advise that all is going well at Malabar Cottage. The cottage keeps taut and stanch ; and now that my old shipmate Creary has joined me, we keep to the weather side of the butcher's bill without any difficulty.

We pull along on a even keel wonderfully well, Creary being a good-natured man, and as pleasant a shipmate as one could wish. He has brought his bits of things with him, and alongside of mine they make a homely look. My dearie, I miss your sweet voice about the house, and sometimes I feel a bit lonely, but being a rough seafaring man I know that Malabar Cottage was hardly fit for a lady like yourself. The Count de Lloseta has twice been down to see me, sitting affable down to our bit of lunch with us and making Creary laugh till he choked. I don't rightly understand how it was that the Count and your good husband the captain (R. N.) fixed up my money affairs, getting so much of it back from Mertons' while others haven't had a halfpenny. I asked the Count to explain, which he did at some length. But I didn't rightly understand it, never having had a good head for figures, though I could always work out my sums near enough to fix her position on the chart at mid-day. I take it that Mr. Lloseta has got a gift for financials, leastwise he pays me my money most regular, and last time there was two pounds more. I am sure I ought to feel thankful that I have such good friends, and people too, so much above me. I understand that the Count de Lloseta is going out to Majorca this autumn. He is a good man.

Your affectionate uncle,
WILLIAM JOHN BONTNOR (Master)."

Eve read this effusion with a queer little smile which

had no mirth in it. She folded the letter carefully and laid it aside for her husband to see when he returned. Then she fell into a reverie, looking down over the great silent valley that lay between her and the sea. She had been out into the world and had come back to D'Erraha again. In the world she had had a somewhat singular experience. She had never loved a woman, she had never known a woman's love. One man after another had come into her life, passing across the field of her mental vision when it was most susceptible to impression, each influencing her life in his own way, each loving her in his own way, each claiming her love. Here was a woman, the mother of a man-child, whose every thought had been formed by men, whose knowledge had been acquired from men, whose world was a world of men. She would not have known what to do with a daughter, so Fate had sent her a son. From the Caballero Challoner to Fitz, from Fitz to Captain Bontnor, from Captain Bontnor to John Craik, and from Craik back to Fitz, this, with Cipriani de Lloseta ever coming and going, in and out, had been Eve FitzHenry's life.

With it all she was the womanliest of women, else, indeed, her story had never been told, for men cannot write of manly women.

These men had only taught her to be a woman, as men ever do; but from them she had acquired the broader way of taking life, the larger way of thinking, which promised well for Henry Cyprian lying asleep on her lap.

She was thinking of these men, of all they had taught her, of all she had learnt from them without their knowing it, when one of them came to her. Fitz had dismounted in the patio and came walking somewhat stiffly through to the terrace. He had been out all day on a distant part of the D'Erraha property, for he combined the farmer and the sailor. He had applied for a year's leave after having served his country for fifteen. The year had run into fifteen months, and there was talk of the time when he should go to sea no longer.

Fitz had changed little. The cloud, however, that had formerly hung as it were in his eyes had vanished, Eve had driven it away, slowly and surely. Perhaps Henry Cyprian had something to do in the matter also by pushing his uncle Luke out of the place he had hitherto occupied in Fitz's heart. Luke had voluntarily relinquished the place to a certain degree. He had left England three years before to seek his fortune in other seas, and Fortune had come to him as she often does when she is sought half-heartedly. Luke commanded one of the finest war-ships afloat, but she sailed under the Chilian flag.

"Letters," said Fitz.

Eve smiled and handed him Captain Bontnor's epistle. She watched his face as he read—she had a trick of watching her husband's face. This was a hopelessly taciturn man, but Eve seemed to understand him.

There was another letter unopened and addressed to

Fitz. He took it up and opened it leisurely, after the manner of one who has all he wants and looks for nothing by post.

Eve saw his face brighten with surprise. He read the letter through and then he handed it to her.

"Llosета," he said, "is coming. He is in Barcelona."

Eve read the letter. She leant back in her deep chair with a pensiveness, a faint suggestion of weariness bespeaking the end of a convalescence, which was perhaps climatic.

"I have never understood the Count," she said. "There are so many people one does not understand."

She broke off with a little laugh, half impatient.

"Yes," said her husband quietly. "Whom are you thinking of?"

"Agatha."

Fitz was gazing at the fine quartz gravel beneath his feet.

"Agatha cared for Luke," he said.

A faint flicker of anxiety passed across Eve's eyes—the mention of Luke's name always brought it. She had never seen this twin brother—this shadow as it were of Fitz's life—and it had been slowly borne in upon her—perhaps Henry Cyprian had taught her—that there is a tie between twins which no man can gauge nor tell whither it may lead.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I know."

"How do you know? Did she tell you?"

Eve smiled.

"No; but I knew long ago. I do not think she was good, Fitz, but that was good in her—quite good. People say that it sometimes saves men. It often saves women. I think it is better for a girl to have no mother at all than to have a foolish mother, much better, I am sure of it."

"Women like Mrs. Ingham-Baker," said Fitz, gruffly, "do more harm in the world than women who are merely bad. She made Agatha what she was, and Agatha made Luke throw away the *Croonah*."

"But the Court decided that it was an unusual current," said Eve, who had followed every word of the official inquiry.

Fitz shrugged his shoulders.

"He threw the ship away," he said. "Sailors like Luke do not get wrecked on the Burlings."

Eve did not pursue the subject, for this was the shadow on their happiness. It has been ruled that we are not to be quite happy here, and those are happiest who have a shadow that comes from outside—from elsewhere than from themselves or their own love.

Eve, womanlike, had thought of these things, analyzing them as women do, and she recognized the shadow frankly. She was too intelligent, too far-sighted to expect perfect bliss, but she knew that she had as near an approach to it as is offered for human delectation, neutralized as it was by that vague regret which is only the reflection of the active sorrows of others.

Fitz had handed the Count's letter to his wife. She

read it slowly and allowed it to drop. As it fluttered to her lap she caught sight of some writing on the back.

"Did you see the postscript?" she asked.

"No."

She turned the letter and read aloud.

"I saw Craik just before I left. He was, I think, in better health. His mind is much too brilliant, his brain too active, his humour too keen to be that of a sick man. When I told him your good news he quite forgot to be rheumatic. 'Glad to hear it, glad to hear it,' he said. 'She was much too good to be a mere writing woman.' By the way, I imagine Eve never learnt that all the Spanish articles except the first, passed through my hands as well as Craik's before publication. I knew who wrote them, and am still one of their profoundest admirers, but, like John Craik, I am well content that the gifted author should turn her attention to other things, notably to my godson, to whom salutations. Did either of you ever meet young Lord Seahampton, an excellent fellow, with the appearance of a cleanly groom and the heart of a true knight? He was killed while riding a steeplechase last week. I regret him deeply. He was one of my few friends."

Eve laid the letter down with a little sigh, a species of sigh which she reserved for Cipriani de Lloseta.

"He is a nineteenth-century Quixote," she said. "No one ever knows what good he may be doing."

Then they fell to talking of this man, of what he had

done and what he had left undone. They guessed at what he had suffered, and of the suffering which he had spared others they knew a little; but of his own feelings they were ignorant, his motives they only knew in part. His life had been lived out to a certain extent before them, but they knew nothing of it; it was a mere superficies without perspective, and Eve, womanlike, wanted to put a background to it.

"But why," she persisted, from the height of her own happiness, which had apparently been so easy to reach, "why does he lead such a lonely, gloomy life? Why has he so few friends? Why does he not come and live at Lloseta instead of in the gloomy palace in the Calle de la Paz?"

"His life is all whys," answered Fitz; "it is one big note of interrogation. He said that some day he would tell us, no doubt he will."

"Yes; perhaps so."

Eve reflected, and again she indulged in a short sigh.

"And after he has told us there will be nothing to be done, that is the worst of it; there will be nothing to be done, Fitz."

"There never has been anything to be done," replied Fitz, slowly, as was his wont. "That has been the key-note of his life as long as I have known him. If there had been anything to do, you may be sure that De Lloseta would have done it."

Eve was bending over the small beginnings of a man

lying supine on her knees. She drew Henry Cyprian's wraps closer around him preparatory to taking him indoors.

"Then his is surely the saddest life imaginable," she said.

CHAPTER XV

THE COUNT'S STORY

"And yet I know
That tears lie deep in all I do."

THE pine forests on the mountain-tops were beginning to gather the darkness as the Count de Lloseta rode up the last slope to the Casa d'Erraha. The sun had just set behind the rocky land that hides Miramar from D'Erraha. A stillness seemed to be creeping down from the mountain to the valley. The wind had gone down with the sun.

The Count rode alone beneath the gloom of the maritime pines which grow to their finest European stature on the northern slope of D'Erraha. He had been in the saddle all day; but Cipriani de Lloseta was a Spaniard, and a Spaniard is a different man when he has thrown his leg across a horse. The suave indolence of manner seems to vanish, the courtly indifference, the sloth and contemplativeness which stand as a bar between our northern nature and the peninsular habit. De Lloseta was a fine horseman—even in Spain, the nation of finest horsemen in the world; also he was on Majorcan soil again. He had landed at Palma that morning from the

Barcelona steamer, and he had found Fitz awaiting him with a servant and a led horse on the quay.

There was a strangely excited gleam in De Lloseta's dark eyes which Fitz did not fail to notice. The Count looked around over the dark wild faces of his countrymen and met no glance of recognition, for he had been absent forty years. Then he raised his eyes to the old city towering on the hillside above them, the city that has not changed these six hundred years, and he smiled a wan smile.

"I have brought a horse for you," said Fitz, "either to ride back to D'Erraha with me now or to take you to Lloseta, should you care to go direct there. Eve has packed up some lunch for you in the saddle-bag if you think of going to Lloseta first."

The Count nodded.

"Yes," he said, "that is like Eve, she would think of such things."

He went up to the horse, patted it, measured the length of the stirrup-leather, and then turned to Fitz.

"I will go to Lloseta," he said. "It is only natural after forty years. I will be with you by seven o'clock to-night at D'Erraha."

Fitz did not offer to accompany him, and Cipriani de Lloseta rode that strange ride alone; unknown, an outcast in his own land, he rode through the most fertile valley in the world, of which every tree was dear to him; and no man knew his thoughts. The labourers in the fields, men and women, brown, sunburnt, half Moorish,

wholly simple and natural, paused in their toil and looked wonderingly at the lonely horseman; the patient mules walking their ceaseless round at the Moorish wells blinked lazily at him; the eagles of Lloseta swept slowly round in a great circle far above the old castle, as they had swept in his childhood, and he looked up at them with his strange patient smile. He pushed the great olive-wood gate open and passed into the terraced garden, all overgrown, neglected, mournful. It was a strange home-coming, with no one near to see.

He spent the whole day at Lloseta engaged in the very practical work of employing men to labour at the garden and in the house. It was, he said, his intention to come back to his "possession," as these Majorcan country houses are called, to inhabit it the larger part of the year, and to pass the remaining winter months at his palace in Palma.

In the afternoon he mounted his horse, and in the evening, as has been said, he reached D'Erraha.

A servant must have been watching his approach, for the large door was thrown open and he rode into the patio. Fitz was here to welcome him, and behind him Eve, with Henry Cyprian in her arms. No one spoke. It was rather singular. The Count dismounted. He took off his hat and held it in the Spanish mode in his hand while he shook hands with Fitz and Eve. He looked round the patio. He noted the old marble well, yellow with stupendous age, the orange trees clustering over it, the palms and the banana trees, then he smiled at Eve.

"After many years," he said.

There was a little pause.

"I should have wished to see your father," he said, "amidst these surroundings."

Eve gave a little nod. From long association with men she had learnt a manlike reticence. She moved a little towards the open archway leading through to the terrace.

"We have some tea," she said, "waiting for you. Will you come to the terrace?"

He followed her, while the servant led the tired horse away.

They sat at the northern end of the terrace, where the garden-chairs always stood, and before, beneath, all around them rose and fell the finest of all the fine Majorcan scenery—scenery which only Sardinia can rival in Europe.

Eve poured out his tea which he drank, and set the cup aside.

They all knew that the time had come for the Count de Lloseta to tell his story—to redeem the promise made to Eve and Fitz long ago, before they were married.

Cipriani de Lloseta leant back in his deep garden-chair nursing one booted leg over the other. He was dusty and travel-stained, but the natural hardiness of his frame seemed to be more apparent than ever in his native land, on his native mountains.

"My poor little tale," he said; "you will have it?"

"Yes," said Eve; and Fitz nodded.

Cipriani de Lloseta did not look at them, but down into the gathering blue of the valley beneath them. His quiet, patient eyes never turned elsewhere during his narrative, as if he were telling the story to the valley and the hills.

"When I was quite a young man everything was too prosperous with me. I was rich, I had health and liberty and many friends; life was altogether too simple and easy for me. Before I was twenty-one I met my dear Rosa and fell in love with her. Here again it was too easy, too convenient. Fate is cruelest when she is too kind. The parents wished it. The two families were equally old, equally rich; and lastly Rosa—Rosa was kind enough to be—kind to me."

He paused, pensively rubbing his clean-shaven chin with his forefinger, his long profile was turned towards Eve, standing out like brown marble against the gloom of the valley. Eve wondered over this woman, this Rosa, who had been forty years in her grave. She wondered what manner of woman this must have been to have kept the love of a man through all these years by a mere memory, but she did not wonder that Rosa had been kind.

"She saw things in me that do not exist," Cipriani de Lloseta went on quietly. "It is so with women when—and men may thank God that it is so."

He gave a little laugh, unpleasant to the ear—the laugh of a man who has been right down to the bottom of life and comes up again with a sneer.

Eve and Fitz made no sign. This story was like wine that has lain forgotten in the dark for many years, it needed careful handling. Henry Cyprian turned on his silken cushion, and opening his great dark eyes watched the speaker with that infantine steadfastness of gaze which may perchance see more than we suspect.

"We were married"—he paused and gave a jerk of the head towards Palma, behind him to the left—"in the cathedral, and were quite happy. At that time the Harringtons were living, or rather staying, in this house with your good father. Neither of you ever saw the Honourable George Harrington; your loss is infinitesimal. For some reason they began to come to Lloseta a good deal—some reason of Mrs. Harrington's. She was always a singular woman, with a reason for all that she did, which I, in my old-fashioned way, do not think good in a woman. She disliked my wife. I could see that through her affectionate ways. I do not know why. Men cannot understand these things. Rosa was very beautiful."

Eve, who was watching his face, gave a little nod—a mental nod, as it were, for her own edification. It is possible that she, being a woman, understood.

"Finally they came to stay a few days—you know the Spanish hospitality. She forced it on us against our will. I was particularly averse to it because of—Rosa. I wanted to be quietly at Lloseta. We intended to live almost entirely in Majorca. We wanted our children to

be Majorcans, and especially a son. The Harringtons stayed longer than we invited them for. They were well-bred adventurers. I have met many such in English country houses—people who shoot, and fish, and hunt at the expense of others. It suited them to stay at Lloseta, and they did so. They were people who got the best of everything by asking for it—by looking upon it in a well-bred way as their right. I did not mind that, but I wanted them to go, on account of Rosa. Also I disliked the woman's manner towards myself; it altered when Rosa was not there, you understand. We have a word for it in Spain, but I will not say it because the woman is dead."

There was a rasping sound as he drew his first and second fingers across his closely shaven chin. It is a singular thing that cynics usually reserve the keenest shafts for women. The Count de Lloseta's smile was distinctly unpleasant.

"At last I informed Rosa that they must be told to go, and Rosa was very angry. It was her pride—the pride of a new-fledged hostess, of a young matron. She was Spanish, and hot tempered. My inhospitality was terrible to her, and she spoke sharply. I was quicker to feel and to act then than I am now. I answered her. I would not give way, thinking, as I was, of the son we hoped for. It was nothing, but we raised our voices. In the heat of the argument I lifted my hand. Rosa thought that I was going to strike her—a strange mistake. She stepped back and fell. You know our

marble floors. She struck her dear temple against the floor, and she lay quite still. I heard a sound, and turning, saw Mrs. Harrington in the doorway. She had been listening; she had seen everything. Rosa never recovered consciousness; she died. It was terribly easy for her to die. It was equally hard for me to continue living. Mrs. Harrington helped me in my great sorrow to a certain extent, but she would not help me by going away. Then, as soon as Rosa was buried, she told me that unless I gave her money she would tell all Spain that I had murdered my wife. At first I did not understand. I did not know that God had created women such as this. But she made her meaning quite clear. Indeed, to do this thoroughly, she hinted to the neighbours that she knew more than she had disclosed. All Majorca would turn its back upon me—all except the Caballero Challoner. I paid the woman. I have paid her ever since, and I do not regret it. What else could I do? After many generations of honour and uprightness I could not let the name of Lloseta fall into the hands of a low woman such as Mrs. Harrington. I had to pay heavily, but it was still cheap. I saved the name. No breath of dishonour has reached the name of De Lloseta de Mallorca. I got her out of Majorca, and my old friend Challoner set himself the task of silencing the gossips. But I found that I had to leave Lloseta —for the name's sake I quitted my home."

He spread out his hands with a patient gesture of resignation.

"Such has been my life," he went on. "It has been spent in preserving the name unspotted, in paying Mrs. Harrington, and in praying the good God to make her life unhappy and short. In His greater wisdom He prolonged her life, but it was never a happy one, for God is just. I am the last of the Llosetas. The name will die, but it has lived for six hundred years and it dies as it lived—unspotted—one of the great names of the world."

He broke off with a little laugh.

"Spanish pride," he said. "I must beg your indulgence. My life you know. It has not been a happy one. I have never forgotten Rosa; I have never even tried. I have had several objects however in life; it has not been uninteresting. One of the chief of these objects has been to repay to a minute extent the true friendship of my dear Challoner. He was a friend in need. He taught me to look upon the English as the finest race of men on this planet. I may be wrong, but I shall adhere to my opinion. In my small way I attempted to repay in part to the Caballero Challoner's daughter all that I owed to him; but I only ran against a pride as strong, as sensitive as my own. My child, you did quite right!"

He turned to Eve, smiling his patient smile.

"And now," he went on, "I shall have my way after all."

He laid his hand on Henry Cyprian, who was conscientiously putting the Valley of Repose to its best use.

"After all, this little caballero was born at D'Erraha. D'Erraha is his; is it not so?"

And Eve, giving up her pride to him—casting it down before his loftier pride—came round to his chair, and bending over, kissed him silently.

THE END.

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